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IN THE OLDEN TIME.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE ATELIER DU LYS,' 'MADEMOISELLE MORI,'

ETC.

NEW EDITION.

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PREFACE.

THE PERIOD of the Peasant War of 1524–5 in Germany is one of such unrelieved gloom, that it would not lend itself to the purposes of fiction, were it not that even then domestic life went on, endangered indeed, and greatly agitated, but persistent. It is the effect of this wild and troubled time on the fortunes of private individuals, rather than its historical side, which is presented in the following tale.

One historical character, however, appears in it, drawn in a more favourable light than that in which he is usually shown. Ulrich of Würtemberg has had the misfortune to be chiefly known to posterity through the writings of implacable enemies, who, while observing to the full the precept of 'Nothing extenuate,' have set down a great deal in malice. Historians have accepted their statements only too readily, and only one here and there has noted that the later life of Duke Ulrich redeemed the offences of earlier years, and amply showed that he had learned the uses of adversity.

Readers of old German chronicles will recognise the outline of the leper's story—the 'poor clerk who sat desolate, while all Germany sang his songs.'

It should perhaps be added that the name of 'Rosilde' was hereditary in one or two ancient families, and seems early to have been accepted as meaning a rose, though derived from quite another source.

IN THE OLDEN TIME.

CHAPTER I.

THERE have been times in every country where the art of preaching is practised when it has sunk to so low an ebb as to have lost all influence and to have fallen into derision, times when the people lent a weary and scornful ear to preachers with no message to give. Never, perhaps, was this more strikingly the case than in Germany at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The great religious movement of two hundred years earlier had died away, or was crushed by Rome; the pulpit had become merely a means of recommending abuses encouraged by the Church, or a place where the listeners were entertained by coarse jests and stories. When Easter came with its unmannerly revels, the priest of such a country village as that in the Ilzthal would interrupt his discourse to cry cuckoo, or cackle like a hen, or tell a legend of how St. Peter, drinking at a tavern, had by a merry trick cheated mine host of his score, and the church, tolerably well filled for once in the year, would resound with laughter and applause. For some forty years the Ilzthalers had had no better shepherd than this Pfarrer Cyprian, and it was small wonder if Luther could assert of peasants under such pastors that they 'lived like the dear cattle and unreasoning swine, came not once to church in five Sundays, nor to the Lord's Table in five years.' Spiri-

tual life had died out, and only terrified and timid superstition remained. If any preacher dared speak home truths, he might expect to be fallen upon and beaten as soon as he left the church. Pfarrer Cyprian knew this, and never made the experiment.

But there were signs of a mighty reviving breath blowing over Germany; a prophet and teacher had arisen, and here and there throughout the land one and another, though often opposed to his special doctrines, was roused to speak stirring words, and though such voices were apt to be silenced, or sent by ecclesiastical authority to out-of-the-way places, yet even in a desert a preacher who can speak to men's hearts will find an audience gather; and such an one, it was rumoured, had come to the Ilzthal to replace Pfarrer Cyprian, now laid in the graveyard around the Church of St. Eustatius —a little space, enclosed by a low thick edge of fir-trees, clipped as close as a box edging, with here and there a single tree standing up, its lower boughs trimmed away, exactly like the trees in a Noah's ark, which indeed were doubtless copied from such a model. Many a Noah's ark, with other toys and pine-wood furniture, were sent from the Ilzthal and the neighbouring valleys to Eisenach and Erfurt, for the villagers in this district rivalled even Nüremberg in their handiwork, and though transport from such secluded spots was difficult, on the top of the wooded hills ran the Rennsteig, a good highway along which traffic could pass.

The Ilzthal was a narrow valley in the great Thuringian forest, and in the upper part hardly more than a wild ravine, and the village at its mouth stood rather where it could than where it would, all the houses being crowded on a spot of ground round one end of which the wild mountain stream, which rushed down from the high land beyond, made a sudden turn, converting it into a miniature peninsula. Almost every house had a stone passage built under it to allow the water, when in flood, time and space to escape, instead of hurling its weight against the walls. They were irregular one-storied houses, with high steep roofs, covered with

brown tiles, or else slated like the little steeple of the church; and a few, belonging not to serfs but free peasants, were cased all over with a kind of slate-armour, like a knight in his mail. But most of them were very humble, with rough stone steps, and small windows letting in little air or light, and more than one was so decrepit that it was only kept upright by strong wooden supports, which sustained the projecting upper storey, and were driven deep into the bed of the stream, in spite of the risk that a rush of water would one day sweep them away.

The fronts of the houses all looked across the stream towards the great mass of rock towering above the church, and known as the Burgstein, whose giant cliffs, scarred and rent by time and tempest, seemed ever threatening to fall and crush the church below, and yet stood on, and stand there still, just as they did that autumn evening in 1524 when the new priest of Ilzthal was preaching to his flock.

The church was strangely niched under the rocks, probably to be out of the way of the stream when it swelled in flood, and the architecture was perforce adapted to the situation. Two narrow aisles enclosed a wide nave, with pillars rising to support a roof whose lofty height was out of all proportion to the diminutive little steeple. The building was evidently the offering of a piety or a remorse which had sought to spend on it all which could be spent. The carved work came from the hand of artificers from Ulm; the windows glowed with gorgeous painted glass, and around the capitals of the pillars were carved roses, bud and blossom, leaf and fruit, the badges of the lord of Burgstein, who dwelt in the castle which crowned the rocks overhead, and whose ancestors had built the church and dedicated it to their patron saint.

Never in the memory of anyone in the valley had such a congregation been seen within its walls as was gathered there that autumn evening, and, instead of whispering, interrupting the sermon by audible remarks, or beguiling the time with deep draughts from the beer

cans which they brought with them and set under their seats, the listeners grew more and more wrapt in absorbed attention.

They were all peasants, but by no means all Ilzthalers; the fame of the preacher must have travelled far, for among his hearers were some from distant valleys—charcoal-burners and miners, serfs from other estates, and a sprinkling of free Bauers, owning their own land, but hardly better off than serfs.

The soft dusky twilight had hardly yet gathered outside of the building. There was a pink glow in the western sky passing into saffron; a bright gleam yet lingered on the highest trees at the farther end of the little valley, and on the cross of stone roses upon the roof of the church, and in the scattered silvery spray of the Pöllatwasser, as it leaped out of a cavern far overhead, and showered down into the stream flowing below. But within the building it had grown so dark that the faces of the congregation were dim and indistinct. Standing, as he did, above them, the countenance of the preacher was however visible in a shaft of light which fell from a window of clear glass, high up, and illumined the pale features. So wrapped were his auditors in his discourse that none could have told if he had spoken a long time or a short one, but now he was near the end of his sermon. He leant slightly forward, with an intense pleading earnestness.

'You dread Hell, dear brothers,' he was saying, 'and you are right. But understand this, all of you, it is not through pilgrimage, or offering, or indulgence, that you will escape it. Hell is the absence of God. As far as He is absent, any condition is like hell, only here we are so taken up with what we behold, and handle, that only now and then do we know this. When we die, those things are gone, and we must face the want of Him. But, say you, we fear God as much as we do hell. How shall we stand before Him? How shall we see Him? Ah, friends, you *cannot* see Him, for without holiness no man shall see His face here or hereafter. No, we dare not look on Him, even if we

could. But——' and the mellow, musical voice took an indescribable tone of rapturous, tender triumph, 'there is One on whom we may look, and see God and yet live—our dear Lord. Our dear Lord!' he repeated, looking upward, and standing for an instant with raised hands, and such a gaze of wrapt devotion and glad certainty, that perhaps not one heart there but was thrilled for an instant at least with the perception of that mysterious, unique attraction of the Cross which is the secret spell of Christianity. There was a moment of perfect stillness; then the look of one communing with an unseen world faded from the preacher's face; he sighed, looked down for an instant on the congregation, already shaking off the spell which he had cast upon them, and gave the blessing. They rose as if in haste to escape from the strange new feeling which he had awakened, and flocked out of the church. Most of the women hastened homeward with their children, but many of the men lingered to discuss what they had heard, and him who had spoken. There was a hush as they saw him leave the church by a side door, and turn towards his small, isolated house, close by—a man of middle stature, with finely cut pale features, dark eyes, and a sensitive beautiful mouth. It was the face of a man who could not go through life without suffering keenly; who would feel as anguish what a coarser or stronger nature would hardly count pain at all. A man with that look would be sure to shrink all his life long with morbid horror from anything base, or coarse, or painful, even while forcing himself pitilessly to encounter it. He looked singularly out of place among his rustic flock.

Everyone looked after him with interest, or, at all events, a dull curiosity. 'A good man!' one bystander murmured, with a wistful sigh, as if feelings long dormant had been stirred.

'A good man, say you? I know not as to that, but a heretic he is, mark my words,' put in an old woman, leaning on her stick with withered trembling hands.

'Aye, indeed? And how long have you studied

such matters, goody?' asked a neighbour, raising a laugh, amid which she retorted undaunted, 'Needs no learning to see that! Whatever Father Cyprian—rest his soul!—may have been out of the pulpit, when he was there, he gave us plenty of Latin, and roared until the very roof shook. Now this man spoke never a Latin word in his discourse from first to last; too proud is he, no doubt, to spend Latin on such as we.'

'Aye, he is of gentle birth, and all such hang together,' said a gaunt serf, with sunken flashing eyes. 'Speak he never so fair, he is at heart the poor man's foe.'

'Aye, aye, Father Cyprian was one of us; he knew that the common man cannot live as though he were a saint in a shrine,' said the old woman. 'I would the good man were here now. 'Tis not he who would have preached every Sunday and holiday, as though preaching were no solemn thing, but fit for all times. I like not that; 'tis lacking in reverence. And this Herr Basil, never named he one of the blessed saints, no, nor Mary Mother either. 'Tis a heretic, I tell you.'

And she hobbled off, shaking her old head ominously.

'Aye, it is scarce respectful to speak straight to a man's Judge, as he would have us,' said a pale artisan. 'What are the saints for but to pray for us and turn wrath aside?'

'Why, how did men in the old times, before Mary and the saints were born?' asked another, with a touch of contempt.

'Out on you, Jobst Eich! Would you say that the holy Virgin and the saints were not always in heaven to help us and pray for us?' exclaimed a scandalised woman.

'Tush! I spoke not to you, dame, I spoke to Eich here. Answer me if you can, Master Schmidt!'

'Nay, I know not, any more than I know what brought you and Kaspar here within a church,' answered the smith, with a laugh. 'It was ever said the fiend shuns holy water.'

'I came because men begin to speak much of this new priest's discourses, and I would hear for myself,' said the hollow-eyed serf.

'And what think you thereof?'

'For one thing, that if all men be brethren, as he said, to most a younger brother's portion is given—blows and hard work, while the others get the money and lands.'

'A true word! For us nought but new burdens every day—taxes are the only thing the nobles do not keep to themselves,' muttered another, drawing nearer. 'River, wood, and field, are all theirs only, while as for us, we may not so much as break one of the branches which God made grow for all—no, not though snow rise above our heads in winter, and the old and the children perish for lack of fire, even if we men fight through it.'

'Aye, and in summer, when one hopes to lay aside somewhat for the evil months, what chance have we?' broke in a third, who owned a few acres. 'This very day I saw half-a-dozen deer browsing in my field, and when I sought to scare the accursed beasts with shout and trump, they looked me in the face as if they were barons and counts each one of them. The evil things know as well as you or I do that we dare not so much as let fly an arrow against them. It were safer to harm a fellow-man than game or fish!'

'Aye, as I know well,' said the serf Kaspar, slightly lifting a right arm where the hand was wanting. 'And when last flood covered our fields with stones, had we one due less to pay, one day's work let off for our lord because we were ruined men or needed to clear the land ere it could bear again? Or, when widow and orphans are mourning, like Martha Riedl and her children yonder, can the corpse be laid in earth, be they ever so penniless, until the death-tax be paid to their lord? Call you these things brotherly? Yet we are all of one blood and bone, I trow!'

'Well, well, my masters, it has always been so and always will; the lords make the laws, and it is best to

say nought, for who knows how far words may fly?' said an old man, interposing timidly and anxiously, among the group of speakers, who became each moment more excited. 'No man can get out of the skin wherein he was born. Some must be uppermost and some undermost while the world wags.'

'By St. Joseph, but that is true,' said a carpenter, swearing like a pious man by his patron saint. 'And our lord is none of the worst, though his bailiff be cruel hard on us; he has never done such deeds as his cousin of Lichtenberg, for all his soft looks and words. Eugh! fearful tales are told of how he has dealt with his peasants. 'Tis not safe so much as to name him.'

'Aye, hold your peace do, Kaspar; you have had one warning already,' urged a little man, plucking him by the jacket. 'Such talk as yours is treason, and treason means hanging and quartering. You should have more understanding.'

'It would take a long needleful of thread to darn the holes in thine, Schneider,' said Kaspar, raising a laugh at the expense of his interlocutor, the village tailor. 'Such as thou had best leave treason alone; but there are some who can remember——' he lifted his head, and a sudden light kindled in his gloomy eyes—'if not the good days before the priests and lawyers brought in their accursed canon law, at least a time when those who are below nearly got above, and the Golden Shoe may yet be uplifted, and the old song sung again—

"Wer frei will sein, der folge diesem Sonnenschein."'

As those once beloved and familiar, but long forbidden, words were sung, low indeed, but distinctly, a start and thrill went through the group; hasty and anxious looks were cast around, and many dropped out and hurried away.

'Hush, for all the saints' sake! Mary and Joseph! if but a bird carry the song, or if the bailiff be within earshot, 'tis a hanging matter for us all,' urged several, recollecting with abject terror how mercilessly was sup-

pressed all connected with the peasant rebellion of some years earlier, the banner of which had borne a peasant's shoe.

'You are not wise, Kaspar,' said Jobst Eich, who had, however, looked up with an irrepressible flash of enthusiasm when the first notes of the prohibited song caught his ear. 'You scarce 'scaped the halter when you were haled before the Freiherr for fishing in the river, and many a man has had his tongue slit for no worse than speaking of the Bundschuh.'

'All the same if there were but half a dozen brave fellows who would back me up, I would go to the castle and demand that at least no new burdens be laid upon us. I should well like to speak my mind to a noble, face to face, for once.'

'That day may come,' muttered the other serf under his breath.

'Aye, it is ever darkest before the dawn,' answered Kaspar; and then, turning suddenly and vehemently on the rest, 'Do you know that all through the land there is a stir? that again it is like that we shall see if a priest's or a noble's blood be redder than a peasant's? Is it not so, boy? You go all over the country side and hear all that passes,' he added, turning sharply on a slim, blue-eyed lad, who had listened silently, but with great sympathy and interest to what had passed. He nodded but made no other reply, for the priest had come out of his house, and was passing near, with a kind, grave bend of the head to those of his flock who lifted their caps to him, as most did, though some looked sullenly or boorishly away, and no one showed any alacrity to greet him, except the old woman who had accused him of heresy, and who now hobbled eagerly forward and obsequiously begged his blessing, which he gave, but with visible distaste, as if her blear eyes and fawning humility were absolutely insufferable; but his whole expression changed into tender sweetness when a little child ran up and looked confidingly in his face. He laid his hand gently on the flaxen head, spoke in caressing tones, and passed on still with the same sweet,

softened look on his countenance, towards the forest. The old woman shook her head suspiciously, and hobbled away muttering to herself, and more than one spectator followed him with curious eyes, and wondered what took him into the forest at such an hour.

The parley which his appearance had interrupted was not renewed; the villagers had dropped away, and the miners and two or three more, after a word or two with Kaspar, had gone their way. Jobst Eich was the last to go; he spoke low to him, and each as they parted repeated the words which Kaspar had used a little while before, 'It is ever darkest before the dawn.' In a few minutes hardly anyone remained on the green, except Kaspar and the boy whom he had addressed. The sun had now set for some time, and a soft, fragrant, dusky twilight reigned. A bat flitted by, chasing moths. The sound of the stream in the valley, and the rush of the falling Pöllatwasser, hardly audible by day, became suddenly heard. Sounds from a distance came on the ear; the owls began to hoot in the forest, the strange churring of the nightjar, and the call of the quails in the wheat fields thrilled through the air.

'Come, lad, it grows late,' said the Burgstein serf, 'our ways lie together for a while.'

They walked on, side by side, in a way which denoted a certain confidential intimacy, though the boy with his easy, fearless bearing and well-cared-for air, seemed of another rank, almost another race, to the haggard, ragged serf, many years his elder, and already aged by want and suffering. They might have represented Day and Night. For a mile or more their way lay up the valley, and for some time both walked along in unbroken silence.

CHAPTER II.

'HILDEMUND, lad!' said the serf, laying his left hand suddenly on the boy's arm, 'beware of this priest. I saw how you hearkened to him while he preached, and small marvel, since he moved me—me! who know what a priest is—but trust him not; trust no shaven crown. They are all alike, priest and monk, secular and religious, one starling ever chatters like another. Trust them? Was it not a priest who learned in the confessional of the great rising that was planned forty years or so ago, when Mary the Virgin sent Hans Böheim to tell men that there should be neither Pope nor prince, priest nor noble? And what ensued? The false priest told Kaiser Max, and hundreds of peasants were cut down, hanged, quartered, torn by wild horses. Yet the thing was told under seal of confession.'

'Aye, so I have heard.'

'And who imprisoned and burned Hans, know you that too? The Bishop of Würzburg, after solemn promise to give him fair trial, burned him on the green meadow before the castle. Dost think the soul of a man foully murdered like his can rest? a soul who could not fulfil a mission from the Queen of Heaven? No, I tell thee; it must wander until it meet with time and place to begin the work again, and then it would enter into a body, and mighty things should be wrought,' said Kaspar, a wild gleam lighting up his dark and sunken eyes. 'And I think that time has come! I hear voices which tell me that I—I, Kaspar the serf. . . . But I must not tell thee these things. Only remember that priests are all alike—the Cardinal-bishop in his robes, and the Pfarrer Cyprian in darned cassocks, they all hold together, and make the priestly garment the cloak for all the seven deadly sins. And this Pfarrer Basil will be like all the rest.'

'I do not think so,' said the boy, thoughtfully.

'I tell thee he is! I have seen these men close. And if I believed thee traitor and fool enough to whisper a word of what I have told thee——'

'Nay, not I. If I confess any secrets they shall be my own, when I have any,' laughed Hildemund; 'but thou hast said little to me which might not be shouted from the house-top, though, maybe, there is more behind. The stir grows in the land, and it may easily be that many here would rise if they had a Hans Böheim to lead them. But till then thou shouldst talk less freely than to-night after evensong.'

'True; my tongue wagged too fast. My blood gets over hot at times. It is easy to be wary of speech when a thing touches us not, but when it is nearer and dearer than our own soul. . . . Hark you, I know not whose voice thine sometimes echoes, but some things that thou hast said when we talked together were no boy's thoughts. Dost remember saying that if the peasants rise again, they should have somewhat to lay clearly before the Emperor? Those demands which thou didst suggest were wondrous just and well thought of—who had the brotherly heart to devise them? No noble, most surely, nor priest, for they love but their own order; no burgher, for the burgher cares only for his town and his family, and to sleep soft and live well; no peasant, for there was scholar's brains there. Who is it, I say?'

'Nay; peasants have brains, and can use them sometimes,' answered the boy, laughingly, and evidently unwilling to answer the eager, imperative question.

'Dost speak of me? Aye; I had enough learning in the monastery school to set my brains to work, and maybe, had my lord let the abbot have his will, I should be a monk now—a runaway one perchance! But he would not lose a serf, though the abbot tried hard to keep me, for he thought to make something of me. That is nought to the matter in hand. I ask thee again who it is that can feel thus for the serf? There are not many, I wot. 'Tis one who has learning,

and a gentle spirit. Wilt not say? Well, hold thy peace then. But I would I had his words on a bit of parchment. Wilt write them down? No! And wherefore? Wherefore, I say?'

He stopped, and turned his dark and threatening countenance upon the boy, who only smiled and shook his head.

'That bit of parchment were a death-warrant to thee and me, were any eye to light on it,' he answered.

'None ever shall. None, save eyes as safe, nay, safer, than mine. Safer, I tell thee!'

'And if—under torture—it were told whence it came?'

'Torture! The torture has yet to be devised that could wring from me what I choose to keep secret,' answered Kaspar. 'I should know what pain is, too. Did I blench when this hand was chopped off from the wrist, and the red-hot iron seared the wound, and the blood hissed and ceased to rush forth? Fear not that, lad. I shall not betray thee.'

'But others might, and—and—I might myself, under torture; I cannot tell,' said the boy, with a blush of ingenuous shame. 'Who can say beforehand? If it were for myself only—but I have no right——'

He stopped abruptly.

'Wilt thou not ask him? Thy friend?' asked Kaspar, eagerly. 'Surely he will not refuse, if he can feel thus for our wrongs. It is one who has been hard bested and has suffered much, that I see well: all who suffer are to him as brethren. I would I could have speech of him.'

A strange smile passed over Hildemund's face; he made no answer.

'He should be one of us,' added Kaspar, half to himself. 'Yet I know not; there is indeed anguish and wrong that levels all barriers and makes lord and serf alike, yet shoe and boot cannot make a pair, and knight and peasant pull ill together. Theirs is the armed heel and we have the peasant's shoe. It may trample on the knight yet! Hush! there goes the priest. What

evil is he after, wandering so late in the forest? Our ways part here, dear lad. Ask thy friend this thing, and no word, mark me well, to that honey-tongued priest.'

He strode on, following a path through such tangled underwood that only a practised eye could have perceived it, and was out of sight directly; but his rapid steps slackened as he approached the miserable hovel which he inhabited. He seemed to hesitate whether to enter it; then, making up his mind, he suddenly stooped under the low doorway and went in.

There was no furniture at all, and the hut seemed empty; but a low moaning was heard from one corner, where a heap of dry heather and withered leaves was thrown together, and restless movements showed that some living, suffering creature lay there. Kaspar went up to it in the semi-darkness, stooped down, and said:

'Father!'

'Ah, 'tis thou at last,' a weak, quavering voice answered. 'I thought to die before thou didst come back, and best so. Thou wouldst have it so, I know; old folks should not burden the young, though we worked and slaved for them as long as we could. 'Tis a hard world. Give me water; 'tis all gone. I upset the pitcher, and it flowed away, and no one to fetch me a drop all day. Yes, yes, a hard world, and one's children are the hardest in it, and that hurts, you see, that hurts.'

Kaspar went out and refilled the pitcher, which he held to the old man's lips, propping him up as well as he could with his maimed right arm.

'Nought to eat?' asked the plaintive voice, wistfully.

'Nought but this;' and Kaspar took from a hole in the wall a piece of black bread, which he put into the old man's trembling hands, though he had to put a strong force upon himself not to snatch it away. He had hardly tasted food himself that day, and hunger awoke cruelly and fiercely at the sight of food.

'It is not much, truly,' said the old man, revived enough to complain with more energy. 'Our lord is bound to maintain us when we be sick and old, but he sends me not enough to keep body and soul together. I have worked enough for him in my time; yes, or I should not be here now, broken down and racked with pains from head to foot. Three days in every week I had to work for him, the fine for him, the wet for me, and no pay for it; and then the road-mending, maybe just when the flax should be cut, or such crops as the deer and the birds left a poor man, just ready to get in; or else called off to drive game; and when one had anything to sell, the lord must have first offer, at his own price. He might feed me now I think.'

Kaspar made no reply. To go to the castle and ask the dole given by a harsh bailiff, and salted by the never-failing reproach for his own uselessness and the cause of it, cost a struggle which he often had not the power over himself to make.

'And the waters full of fish, and the woods of game, but they are not for such as we,' the tremulous voice maundered on. 'It would be easy enough to trap a bird or a hare, if one only dared.'

'Aye, as I did when my mother lay starving four winters ago. Well, I have still one hand, why not risk that?' replied Kaspar, fiercely and bitterly.

The old man answered by feeble, querulous wailings, half blame, half complaint, indescribably pitiful, and falling like flakes of fire on the son, who, maimed and helpless, could do nothing to relieve or comfort him, and presently started up with a half-uttered curse, and went out of doors, and out of hearing of the piteous wail, 'Kaspar, Kaspar, art leaving me? 'Tis all dark, and my pains be so sharp'—and threw himself down under a tree to lose himself in thought over the hopeless present and the uncertain future. He had been a good son to his parents until want and despair hardened him. He knew and shrank from the thought that the old man had said the truth when he asserted that Kaspar felt him a burden and wished him dead, though

often, as now, giving the last bit of food he had, and enduring keen pangs of hunger to satisfy, as far as possible, his father's. Misery and a vast sense of wrong to himself and all his class were fast killing every germ of mercy and tenderness which had ever existed in his heart. He had received just education enough to raise him above his fellows, and give him wider, though scarcely juster, views, than theirs, and where they endured dumbly, hardly more able to express their sense of injustice and suffering than the brutes, he reasoned about it, and was maddened by what he saw and felt. He knew that in earlier times the only serfs were prisoners or bought slaves, and that it was merely the disorders in the Hohenstaufen times which had reduced the peasants to bondage, the nobles taking advantage of their defenceless condition to acquire their land, giving it back only on condition of service, which passed into thraldom. All this made little difference to most of his fellow-serfs, who were too dulled and ignorant to care for anything beyond brandy and daily bread; but it meant a great deal to Kaspar, and, indeed, there was such a sense of wrong abroad, such a ferment and stir in the minds of men, that even the serfs were more or less affected by it. One such man possessed by a sense of burning wrong as Kaspar might set a whole countryside on fire. On such spirits as his the wild preaching of fanatics fell like a revelation, and there was a great deal of it just then. To him and others like him the simple, honest teaching of Luther seemed tame, while they counted his strong reprobation of rebellion against constituted authority as mere truckling to priests and nobles.

As Kaspar lay sleepless through the greater part of the night under the forest trees his mind was full of wild thoughts, impossible plans for setting all this mass of crooked wrong straight, fierce longing for vengeance on all in high places—schemes which he thought suggested by an influence outside of him, or was it within? and was he, as he sometimes believed, the representative of Hans Böheim, the murdered enthusiast, whom Mary

herself had sent to aid the oppressed. There seemed fire in his heart and brain; visions danced before his eyes; strange sounds murmured in his ears; he hardly knew how the hours passed, or when at last he lost consciousness in heavy sleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE spell which Pfarrer Basil had cast on Kaspar's young companion was too strong to be broken by the serf's warning, and as soon as they parted the boy made all haste to follow the path which the priest had taken, hoping for an occasion to address him. It was readily found. He soon saw Pfarrer Basil walking in front, in a glade where the fir-trees had given place to oak and beech and the fern grew high and thick on either side of the path, his head bent down, his step hurried and uneven, like those of a man a prey to mental pain and trouble. Hildemund heard him speaking in short, broken, half-intelligible sentences, and stopped a few paces off, fearing to be indiscreet in approaching him. His footfall could not have been heard on the turf, yet some consciousness of a human presence must have made itself felt by the priest, for he stopped and turned on the boy a wan and troubled face, gazing vaguely at him, as if his thoughts were so occupied and so far away from the present scene that he could not gather them. Hildemund was greatly struck and startled, and his murmur of apology seemed to rouse Herr Basil to self-possession.

'Ah, good lad!' he said, smiling his peculiarly sweet and gracious smile, whilst his face recovered the winning and tender expression which it had worn when the little children looked up into it as he passed through the village, 'I saw thee in church: thou art a good listener.'

'Surely, sir!' answered Hildemund, looking up at him with frank blue eyes, full of animated pleasure and

interest, his tone expressing that when such a sermon could be heard, none could fail to listen. The priest smiled, with a pleased gratification that had something childlike in it. It was pleasant to him to be thus assured of what nevertheless he must have known already, that his discourse had touched his audience.

'Would your reverence come some day to our house? My mother would hold it a great honour.'

'She was not in the church? is she sick, then? Old she can scarce be,' said Pfarrer Basil, looking at the boy, whose age could not have been beyond fifteen, and who, though very simply dressed, did not wear the peasant shoe, tied high round the ankle, nor the flapping peasant hat, and who seemed in air and bearing altogether superior to the peasant class.

'No, sir, neither old nor sick.'

'Yet she came not with thee?'

'No, Herr Pfarrer.'

'And wherefore? Do you live too far away?'

'Two miles, scarce more; but it is a right lonely place, in the forest. You would not find the way, sir, but I would gladly come and guide you whenever you chose.'

'She has brought her son up to be devout and well-mannered, as I see, but how is it she comes not to mass or sermon?'

The boy coloured and looked down. 'She will come now, I am sure, your reverence,' he said, with embarrassment, and then it struck Pfarrer Basil that from what had reached his ears concerning his predecessor, such a woman as the mother of this fair, courteous lad would probably be, might well shrink from contact with the profligate priest of Ilzthal. He sighed, and a cloud seemed to come over his face and change its lines into pitiless sternness, but they softened again as he turned to the boy and asked his name. 'Hildemund Dahn,' was the answer.

'And whose man are you?'

'No man's, sir,' answered the boy proudly.

'How! no man's?' repeated the priest.

'No, my father was a free man.'

'I might have guessed it,' said Pfarrer Basil, mentally contrasting the courteous, yet fearless bearing of the boy with the cowed and sullen look of the peasant, even on lands where they were comparatively well treated, as on those of the Freiherr of Burgstein.

'Yes, my father was banner-bearer to Graf von Geyer—we are on his lands now; they run up here into those of Burgstein. The Graf is never here now; he has a post about the Emperor.'

'And thy father was his banner-bearer? An honourable post!'

'Yes, sir, and he saved the Graf's life twice, but the second time he was sore wounded; it was in the taking of Aarburg, and he lay long sick in the house of Master Rohrbach, whither he was carried——'

'Rohrbach?' repeated the priest musingly, and vainly trying to seize some association with the name which flitted before him. 'Well?'

'It was there that he knew my mother, Magdalene Rohrbach, and because the Graf greatly favoured him, she was given my father in marriage, and our house and the ground about it made ours for ever. But he could never go to the wars again, so sorely was he hurt, so he became *Bannwart*' (head-ranger). 'He lived only a few years; I scarce can remember him.'

'And your mother lives there still? Did she not long for her kinsfolk and her old home?' asked the priest with some wonder.

'I know not: grandfather Rohrbach is long dead, and grandmother returned to Nüremberg, whence she came, and married again there. My mother speaks little of her maiden life; we could scarce be better than we are, in our own house, on our own land,' said the boy, with pardonable pride.

'I would go with thee now, but it is late, and indeed I know not whither we have strayed,' said Pfarrer Basil, looking round. 'Canst thou guide me back until I can find my way?'

'Gladly, dear sir, I know all the forest round.'

'And the birds and beasts, no doubt. What bird is it that sings so late when all the rest are hushed?'

''Tis the Pfingstvogel, sir; he sits aloft and sings until night sometimes. I have heard that when he leaves us in autumn he crosses the sea to Africa, and comes not again until he can smell the ripe cherries in spring time.'

'What, in Africa?'

'So it is said, sir. Can you see him yonder, a handsome fowl, but lazy; his wife does all the work for the nest, and he preens his feathers and sings. The blackbird and thrush are his cousins, but he is proud and unfriendly, while they are tame, and come round our houses.'

'You Thuringians love birds well. I see one or more in every cottage.'

'Yes, sir, especially the crossbill, for it has a special blessing; you know it sought to take a nail out of the holy cross, and since then its beak has been shaped as you see, and it can draw all poison away that would hurt men, and yet take no harm.'

The priest smiled a little, but made no comment.

'Better believe too much than too little,' he said inwardly.

'And canst thou tell me what this is?' he asked, plucking a leaf of wood sorrel, folded for the night.

'Surely, your reverence. It is Mary's flower; it blossoms in her month.'

'Dost thou know of what the triple leaves are the emblem, my boy?'

'Right well, and the strawberry too; these are both in the picture from Italy that we have at home.'

'So you have a picture from Italy? I had not thought to find one in these parts. You must show it to me when I come to your house.'

'Most gladly, dear sir.'

'You were not alone when you left the village. Who was that I saw with you—a tall, meagre, swart man with one hand?'

'Kaspar, sir; he was maimed for fishing in the

Freiherr von Burgstein's waters, but it truly was to keep his sick mother from starving.'

Hildemund could not read the look which passed over the priest's face. Killing game or catching fish was so grievous an offence that it never occurred to him it was abhorrence of the cruel penalty exacted which that look expressed.

'And the sick mother?' asked Pfarrer Basil, abruptly.

'She died, sir. Old Martin, Kaspar's father, was ailing too, and could earn nothing, and it was winter time, and the ways blocked with snow; no one knew they were in such evil case till Kaspar was set free from the castle prison, and came home and found her dead, and the old man too weak to seek help to bury her. But the Baron showed them mercy, for he remitted the death-tax; so they put her under ground.'

'Ah!' said Pfarrer Basil, with a sarcastic curl of his finely-cut, sensitive lips. 'Aye, that was merciful. What is that?'

He spoke with a start and accent of dismay which astonished Hildemund. 'A rabbit, sir; yes, see, there it comes, and a weasel after it; how the poor beast screams! Nay, then, master weasel, not this time, let my lord's game alone;' and he sprang forward and snatched up the exhausted, terrified little fugitive just as the weasel was upon it. The rabbit lay powerless with exhaustion and terror in Hildemund's hands; the weasel glided swiftly into the fern.

'I would I had a stick here; the beast should not have escaped so easily,' said Hildemund, caressing the panting captive. 'There, get to thy burrow; see, sir, it lies still, too fearful to stir; now it lifts its ears; it will be gone directly.'

'What a cry! Can a beast feel such mortal terror? It will ring in my ears all night,' muttered Pfarrer Basil. He was quite pale and overcome. Hildemund, though a thoroughly kind-hearted boy, and fond of all live creatures, could not help feeling a little wonder and contempt at the effect produced by the rabbit's danger.

'You often hear it, sir. If you did not know what it was you might think a hawk had screamed.'

'In that sight and sound I see and hear the impotent anguish of all helpless, tortured things,' said the priest, passing his hand over his brow. 'My God, how dreadful pain is, wherever it is found!'

Hildemund only dimly understood his meaning, and more dimly still the over-sensitive nervous nature that could feel thus—a nature that must inevitably have suffered keenly wherever and whenever it existed, but was certain to cause its owner peculiar pangs at such a rough time, and in such hard and uncultured surroundings.

'There is Ilzthal, sir,' said Hildemund, presently breaking the silence.

Pfarrer Basil started, roused himself, and bade the boy a hasty good-night.

'Surely I have not displeased him?' thought Hildemund, with quite needless anxiety, for the priest was not thinking of him at all.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was one circumstance which alleviated, nay, almost reconciled, Pfarrer Basil to his exile to Ilzthal, and this was its position in the Thüringerwald. He had but to walk for a quarter of an hour to find himself in complete solitude, unheard, unseen, with, as far as he knew, no eye to watch him, no voice to break on his thoughts. The few farmsteads and cleared grounds were far apart; there were miles of unbroken forest where he was secure of meeting no human being. This was an inestimable advantage, for after any occasion which moved him, any contact with man, whether in the pulpit or in the exercise of his pastoral office, he felt an almost irresistible impulse to get out of sight and hearing, to be alone, and feel solitude secured to him, an impulse which drove him into the loneliest places which

he could reach. These wanderings were strange and unusual at a time when man only felt secure behind strong walls and moats, and were viewed with great wonder and suspicion by the villagers, already jealous and doubtful of a pastor so unlike any of whom they had experience. Father Cyprian, his predecessor, had been peasant born; his faults were theirs, and they understood and were tolerant of them, even while they lowered his office in their eyes. That a man should have a hasty tongue, lead as jovial a life, drink as much brandy, and give himself as little trouble as possible was, if not admirable, quite comprehensible; but a priest like Pfarrer Basil, with his cultured habits, his sternness to himself, and his desire to raise his flock to his own standard, was an alien, suspicious and dangerous. They came to hear him preach; he stirred their interest in spite of themselves, and gave them something to talk about; but they looked askance at him, held aloof, and shut their hearts against him with surly jealousy. He was among them, not of them; he belonged by birth, by manners, by culture, to the race above them—the ruling race. Moreover, some who had chanced to meet him in his lonely walks, and had spied curiously upon him, reported that he talked to himself or to some familiar spirit in an unknown tongue, and looked so strange and distraught that they had fled in terror, not knowing what might befall them if they lingered; and the stories grew with repetition, and fearful and anxious looks were cast on him as he went through the village, and he felt, without knowing why, that he was an object of fear and dislike.

To a nature so sensitive and highly strung, so longing to reach the hearts and touch the souls of his fellowmen, this was peculiarly painful, and increased the mental struggle which often racked him. These were times when conscientious thinkers, especially among the ecclesiastics, suffered cruelly. Unable to shut their eyes to the terrible need of reform in the Church, and hopeless of attaining it; craving to preach pure doctrine, yet trembling lest they should be leading their hearers

into schism; doubtful which was the more important, truth or unity; uncertain, too, whether to trust their own judgment when it ran counter to the overwhelming weight of the authority and antiquity of the great Church of Rome, and crushed by the intense loneliness of the man —especially the priest—who has stepped out of the circle in which his fellows move, and all his interests are concentrated, the robuster spirits made their choice after a great struggle, and the less strong stood doubtful, or succumbed, mute and despairing.

Pfarrer Basil was no Luther, neither was he an Erasmus, contented to rest half way to reform. He was not even convinced that Luther was not the author of immeasurable evil, yet he was so well aware of the corruptions against which Luther was thundering; so unable to avoid denouncing them, that he was looked upon as a dangerous man by his ecclesiastical superiors, and shunned even by personal friends, and felt the isolation of schism while yet in the Roman fold, and believing himself a devout and reverent son of Rome. To send him to Ilzthal might indeed narrow the sphere of his influence, but it must inevitably make him brood more and more on the thoughts which even in busier scenes and a fuller life had haunted him day and night, in spite of fast, and prayer, and spiritual counsel, humbly sought and listened to. It seemed to him sometimes that his brain was giving way, and that he could not tell what was true and what false. A new interest, even such a trifling event as his meeting with the boy Hildemund, was welcome to a degree which made him smile at himself, and he found himself thinking repeatedly of the conversation between them, and the boy's gentle breeding and courteous air, and wondering what the mother was like who had brought him up. Either the way to the Bannwart's house was easier to find than Hildemund supposed, or Pfarrer Basil chanced upon it in one of his wanderings, for before another Sunday had come round he was standing on the plateau where it was built. There was a field or two cleared behind it, without hedges, for hedges were forbidden, lest the game should

be excluded from feeding at their will, but this was only a little space reclaimed from the forest, which extended on three sides, an undulating sea of wood, the deep green of the foliage varied by the late midsummer shoots, tender light red and yellow on the oaks, and almost silvery on the tall, plumy fir-trees. On the fourth side the ground sank more abruptly, and from where he stood Pfarrer Basil could look as far as the Salz forest, where Charles the Great once hunted the boar, and the wild bull, and the great deer, all long extinct, and the eye rested on a fair view, far below, of hill and valley, a distant town, a castled crag, and a cloister, whence came the faint distant sound of bells, at which Pfarrer Basil bent his head and murmured a Latin prayer.

The Bannwart's house, like all in this district which were not mere hovels, was one-storied, raised on a stone platform, with a flight of stone steps; built thus apparently from habit, since here could be no kind of danger from water. The roof was very steep to let snow slide readily off it, and the upper rooms were reached by a little outside staircase, protected by a wooden roof, with a vine clinging to it. The door was open; Hildemund came out with a bird on his finger, to which he was whistling. It put its velvet-capped head on one side and looked up with a curiously intelligent air at him, flying off his hand to his shoulder as he made a sudden movement of surprise and pleasure at seeing Pfarrer Basil standing there, and hurried down to welcome him.

'Dear sir! how good of you to come! My mother feared it might be importunate, or I had sought you before now. Will you please to enter?'

Herr Basil ascended the steps, and found himself in a room not only beautifully clean, but free from the oppressive stove atmosphere which was almost universal in the better class of houses. There was no fire lighted; fresh air was admitted, and much more light than usual; the room was wainscotted half way up, the panelling surmounted by a shelf on which stood pewter cups and

platters and tall glasses; a stone basin and water tap occupied a niche, an unusual sight in Thuringian houses, though in towns the time had gone by when well or spring sufficed as a washing place. Lilies bloomed in a green earthenware jar, and like a lily was the woman who rose from her spinning wheel and came to meet the priest, dressed in the white linen gown which her own hands had spun and made, her light, shining brown hair just visible under the widow's cap, and a deep, untroubled peace, a serene gravity in look and manner which made the very sight of her breathe rest and peace. Involuntarily Pfarrer Basil thought of the lovely woman whom 'Meister Wilhelm' painted for the 'Klara altar' at Cologne.

He gave his blessing as he entered, and she bowed to him with gentle respect, offered him a wooden stool —chairs there were none—and bade Hildemund set down refreshment before him after his walk. The fare was plain enough—bread, cheese, a little fruit, and country wine, but the glass which held it was, as Pfarrer Basil noted, of Venetian make, and the boy waited on him with such smiling pleasure, such eager welcome, that Herr Basil accepted his service with satisfaction, and a feeling of being among his equals, or at least those whom he could treat as such without fear of being misunderstood, came over him like a breath of warm, fragrant wind. His face relaxed; he looked round with smiling interest.

'This is the picture whereof I spoke, reverend sir,' said Hildemund, following his glance and seeing it rest with surprise and admiration on a small wooden panel, hung against the wainscot.

Herr Basil rose, and looked at it long in silence. The painting represented a single angelic form, holding some musical instrument, and looking up with unutterable ecstatic awe on things which human eye could not see nor human tongue utter. Something of that wondrous glory seemed reflected on the face and form. The winged figure, in its vivid robes of blue and crimson and white, stood against a background of pure gold,

flowers at its feet, the mystic strawberry leaves and fruit among them—the lovely revelation of a great master, who had seen the worshippers of the heavenly courts in his visions.

'Even so must they look,' said the priest at last, after a long silent gaze, during which his own face had most unconsciously assumed the ardent wrapt look which he was contemplating. 'The work of a great painter, and doubtless of one who walked close to God.'

'Yes, sir,' said Magdalene, in the sweet full tones which had pleased his ear when she first spoke on his entrance. 'I have heard that he who painted it ever began his work with prayer, and when he drew our dear Master and Lord, it was upon his knees.'

'I believe it, verily. An Italian hand; such limning as this is not known to our more homely masters; Albrecht Dürer himself never gave us aught so heavenly. No, nor the masters of Cologne,' he added, thinking again of the Klara altar and its child-angels.

'Yes, sir; my father brought it from Florence. It is but one part of a larger picture, an outer wing which folded over the middle part, he said. I know not what has befallen the rest.'

'May they be kept as such a treasure merits! Your father was a soldier, belike?'

'No, sir; at one time a merchant, but he found it hard to lead such a life as he deemed a Christian man ought, while seeking after riches, for sin sticks close between buying and selling; so he early gave up his business.'

'Few thus view the means of attaining wealth,' said Pfarrer Basil, surprised. 'Methinks your son said his name was Rohrbach?'

'Yes, sir; he was a peaceable patient man; he went little into company, and was of few words, and very thankful to God.'

'And despised riches, it would seem.'

'What he chiefly desired, dear sir, was that God might work nought in him but with his active concurrence, and he do nothing without God.'

The priest looked attentively at her, struck with the ring of the mystic theology, akin to his own habit of mind, and so simply uttered that the thoughts were evidently part of her daily life.

'That name of Rohrbach seems familiar to me, yet I know not why,' he said, perplexed. Magdalene made no answer, but Hildemund said eagerly,

'It may be your reverence has heard of Berthold von Rohrbach, from whom my grandfather was descended.'

'Berthold! Aye, that is it,' said Pfarrer Basil, with startled recognition. 'I heard of him once when at Basel. How, you are descended from that heretic?'

'Ah, sir,' cried the boy; 'was it so wrong to teach that a layman enlightened by God can teach as well—speaking with all respect, dear sir—as a priest? It was for that he was burned!'

'A monstrous doctrine!' ejaculated the priest.

'Did you hear how he had a fair wife and dear children, and was most happy—so happy that he feared it was sin, and would have renounced all and become a monk had not Nicolas of Basel bidden him rather be thankful, and fulfil his duties as husband and father,' the boy continued, too eager to realise Pfarrer Basil's view of the daring layman.

'My son, you speak overmuch; his reverence will hardly care for these matters,' said Magdalene, reprovingly, and Hildemund coloured and looked abashed, but Pfarrer Basil said kindly,

'Chide him not; I had not heard this tale, further than that the fair wife died, and two of his children, and then he became a priest, but still taught, alas! doctrines condemned by Holy Church, and died the death of fire. Yet he was surely a good man, and constant unto death,' added Pfarrer Basil, as if to himself. 'A hard thing! None can know how hard, save those who have endured it. Let not us who know not what it is to lay down life dare to cast stones at them.'

He had seated himself where he could see the picture, and his eyes were fixed on it, but he withdrew them, and went on in quite another tone.

'But truly I acquit him not of sin, for he had surely done better for himself and the Church by silence and a holy life than by proclaiming doctrines which unsettled the minds of others.'

He spoke sharply, almost irritably, as if answering inward questionings rather than addressing Magdalene and her son. 'When the Church speaks the individual must give way.'

He paused so decidedly for an answer that Magdalene was forced to speak, though apparently, like her father, she was a person of few words and an inward life.

'I cannot say, dear sir. It is likely he only asked himself, "What does the Master say?"'

'Alas! how many answer that question their own way, and so find warrant for all ambition, and greed, and presumption!'

'If it be so, methinks they do know at the bottom of their hearts that they desire not to hear what He says, but to hear Him say what they wish. He is ever near us, but we are not always near Him.'

'"Mecum eras et Tecum non eram,"' murmured the priest, sighing deeply; 'and thus we strive and beat ourselves in vain, and our hunger is not stilled nor our thirst satisfied.'

'It were not so, dear sir, if we remembered that we may not seek our own ends in any creature, whether temporal or eternal; then should we surely attain to perfect satisfaction and content,' said Magdalene in her calm even voice. 'All we have to do is to endeavour to will nothing but what God willeth, and wait on that He will have us to do. It was so that Master Rohrbach taught, and Suso and Tauler, and so that they lived.'

'I know those names, but thought not to hear them thus from your mouth,' said Pfarrer Basil, sternly. 'Were they not those heretics who profanely called themselves the Brethren of the free Spirit?'

'Nay, God forbid!' she answered, in horror far deeper than his own. 'It is blasphemy to name them together!'

A flush had come over her cheeks, a light to her eyes; she seemed stirred to the depths of her soul.

'Surely, reverend sir,' she continued, 'you know better than I how, when the Pope laid under interdict all places which acknowledged as Emperor Ludwig of Bavaria two hundred years ago, some towns and districts were not released for over twenty-six years; the churches were shut, the pious deprived of the means of grace, the wicked left unwarned. Then certain good men, seeing a whole generation consigned to perdition, felt called to go to such places, and speak to the perishing; for surely, sir, neither Pope nor Bishop may withhold the blessings of religion from the many for the sins of the few?'

Pfarrer Basil was silent. The thought, however daring, was not new to him, and a throng of spectral questions which he felt it sin to admit awoke afresh.

'These men called themselves Friends of God,' Magdalene continued, 'and He taught them by visions and revelations. There were twelve of them, bound by no vows, but held together by the bond of love and work for one Master. Nicolas of Basel was their head, and they lived a holy life, and many laid down their lives.'

'I have ever heard they were arch-heretics, and deemed them one with those others whom you seem to hold in such horror.'

'God will know them apart,' she said, in her usual calm tone. 'But if you would indeed know what they taught you should read what they have left us, reverend sir.'

'Frau! you know not what you do when you tamper with heresy,' said the priest, with a look of exceeding pain. 'The wisest, the best may not touch that perilous stuff unhurt. Yet' (and a strange wistful look came over his face) 'I would be unjust to no one willingly, and to judge of these men I should, as you say, know their works.'

She hesitated. There was evidently a struggle in her mind. 'True, father, and with all respect, I think they would lead you into more peace than you have

perchance found,' she said at length; 'and though that is a lesser matter, for they need not to be justified of men, it is but fair to themselves. But I pray you to remember these books are my chiefest treasure, next my son.'

She rose, and unlocked a carved cupboard, where were parchments and a few printed books of later date.

'These my father inherited,' she said, taking down several, 'and they are the most precious things I have to leave my boy. Yet, sir, if you would read them, they are at your service.'

'You show great confidence in me, Frau, for it is no light thing to own to possessing such books as these.'

'I know it, father, but that risk must be run, lest I sin by withholding them from a soul that needs their teaching.'

He glanced at the manuscripts, as if at once strongly drawn to them and yet as strongly repelled; then, suddenly pushing them away, with the same look of pain which had struck Magdalene before, he said, 'Here, too, even here, the temptation meets me! Take back your books, Frau; you know not what you are doing, and if you value your soul cease to study such lore.'

Hildemund looked at his mother, amazed at the passionate vehemence of the priest's tone; she silently replaced the books in the cupboard.

'You are a scholar, it would seem,' said Herr Basil, evidently trying to resume his ordinary tone. 'Few laymen, let alone women, are clerkly enough to read such crabbed pages. And have you made this fair boy a scholar too? Nay, he should be at school; boys soon grow over a mother's head!'

'Not my Hildemund, sir.'

'So say all mothers; yet here perchance it is not mere motherly fondness. But a tall lad like this should be at school among his fellows.'

'Nay, sir, you will deem it a mother's softness, but

I could not send my boy where perchance he would be beaten fifteen times in one day, for no fault, but only to break his spirit. And what would he learn?'

'And you, my boy, are you content to stay here?'

'There are some whom I would be very loth to leave, sir,' answered Hildemund, colouring.

'And how spend you your time, my son?' asked the priest, to whom it seemed a matter of course that he should put any questions he pleased. 'I saw a field or two, and a garden of fruit and herbs, but you do not spend your time over them?'

'No, sir; many come to my mother for salves and simples, and I seek plants both for her and the apothecary at Rothenfels, and if our folks need aught I fetch it for them when I go thither, and I carry books to the cloisters and farms in my pack.'

'Books!' said Pfarrer Basil, with a priest's instinctive suspicion of study among the laity. 'And what books?'

'Oh, many, sir; pamphlets and other writings to the cloisters, and to the farmsteads, and the burghers in many small towns. All kinds of works—"Das Kleyn Planeten büchlin," and "The White Knight," and "Sodonca, Queen of Pritania,"—and many others.'

Pfarrer Basil's face clouded. The century of reform had begun with a bull introducing the censure of books, and forbidding to buy or sell any not previously approved by the Church. But still from Cologne and Nüremberg, Augsburg and Basel, poured forth broadsheets and pamphlets, as well as legends and chapbooks and learned treatises, and however deep was the ignorance of the lower classes, serfs often being sternly forbidden to learn to read or write, the townsfolk eagerly bought such works as came within their reach, and Luther's writings, even where most contraband, were circulated from hand to hand, often in convents and monasteries, where they worked mightily. Pfarrer Basil knew it, and he frowned. It was obviously not for nothing that Hildemund and his mother had Berthold von Rohrbach as an ancestor.

'An idle life and a perilous, dame. Unwise and blameworthy are you surely to bring up the lad thus.'

'As yet I have seen no leading to another life, sir,' she answered, with gentle dignity.

'Have you no kinsfolk who could help him to some wholesome trade, or to be a clerk, if he incline to learning?'

'Yes, sir, I have kinsfolk who no doubt would receive him, but I must wait until I am enlightened that I do well to send him to them.'

'And where dwell these kinsfolk?'

'Some in Augsburg and Ulm, but my grandfather and mother in Nüremberg.'

'The Pegnitzstadt! I know that fair city well: it may be, their name is not unknown to me?'

She made no answer, until directly asked the name of her mother's family, and then there was a perceptible hesitation before she answered, 'My mother was a Paumgärtner.'

'How!' exclaimed Pfarrer Basil, with a start, 'a Paumgärtner, say you? But how then——'

He stopped short. Hitherto he had addressed her with a certain unconscious condescension, as her superior both by birth and office, and it was with an absolute shock of astonishment that he learnt she belonged to those merchant princes who rivalled the Fuggers themselves, and were known throughout Europe for their vast commercial enterprises, with houses at Venice and Archangel, Lisbon and London, in the Levant and in the ports of the Adriatic. Magdalene perfectly understood his thoughts.

'Your reverence would ask why, when my kinsfolk are, as the world counts, rich and powerful, I remain here,' she said, while Hildemund, who had rarely heard her speak of her family, came nearer and listened eagerly. 'When I was left a widow I had little heart to care for aught earthly, for my treasure was doubly in heaven, and presently I found that if I returned to my mother, herself a widow, but about to marry a Pirkheimer, she, who had ill liked my wedding Kilian Dahn,

would seek to dispose of my hand again, and this might not be. Moreover, I saw my way to being useful to the poor folk here where I had lived with my dear husband, and it was clear to me that I was to abide in my place.'

'But the boy! Was it well to throw away all the advantages which such kindred could give him?' asked Pfarrer Basil, scandalised to find a grandson of the great merchant house of Paumgärtner, and a connection of the hardly less well-known Pirkheimers, leading the humble life which Hildemund had described.

'Nay, sir, perchance he had lost more than he gained. Those who are reared in luxury mostly care little for the kingdom of heaven. It may be, that one day I am shown that he should leave me, and seek my kindred—none are left of my father's family—but as yet it has not been so, and I think he is content to stay with me.'

'That am I,' said the boy, emphatically, though there had been a kindling of interest and eager curiosity as he listened. Herr Basil could hardly believe what he heard. This calm indifference to all those things which the world most grasped after, this quiet waiting on Providence, seemed to him so strange, so enviable, and so rare, that he could hardly realise it.

'Beati immaculati in viâ,' he murmured; 'even in the cloister seldom saw I such faith.' And then, aloud, playfully alluding to the bird which was jealously trying to attract Hildemund's attention,

'Well, then, stay here, and train thy little bird, my son, and obey thy mother. How hast thou so trained thy little dompfaff?'

'Ah, you know what we call it, dear sir!' cried Hildemund, delighted, and stroking with one finger the velvet cap which no doubt gained the bullfinch the name by which Pfarrer Basil had called it. 'It is easy to tame these little things; if you take them young and treat them tenderly they will give you all their heart, and even refuse to leave you if you set them free. See, it will not leave me though I try to drive it away, but scolds and flutters back.'

'Tis somewhat to have even a bird that is so loving and faithful,' said Pfarrer Basil, sighing.

'Ah, dear sir, may I train one for you? It were too much honour. I would offer you this one, but it is promised to the little Fräulein Rosilde, and I must take it as soon as I can to the castle, for she is of an impatient humour, and loves not to wait for what she desires. Already, I fear, it likes me too well easily to be happy with anyone else.'

'Yes, I would gladly have one,' said Pfarrer Basil, seeing how much pleasure his assent would give the eager boy. 'But see it be young, my son, not one which knows what freedom is and pines after it. So the little lady of the castle is a friend of thine?'

'Nay, sir, you are laughing at me. But I like well to pleasure her, for she is like a little queen; and the old seneschal, Walther of the Scarred Countenance, loves her better than his life, though he calls her Dornröschen, and says she is as full of thorns as of sweetness. *He* will have no one say 'tis pity she is not a boy.'

'Ah, true, there is no other heir.'

'No, sir, the next heir is Graf von Lichtenberg, the Fräulein's cousin, and it is said that the little Burgfräulein is one day to wed the Graf's son, Wolfgang —more's the pity.'

'So! Is Graf von Lichtenberg in these parts? Methinks he has no lands here.'

'No, sir, no lands, and by all accounts it is well; for all he speaks so smoothly, I know not that he is better than Junker Wolfgang, who is never so joyful as when he can make man or beast suffer. But the Graf comes here for the chase, to the castle of Graf von Geyer, who lends it him, or for his own matters—I know not what.'

'And the little maiden is betrothed to Wolfgang von Lichtenberg?' said Pfarrer Basil, who had some knowledge of both father and son, and whose face expressed pity and regret.

'That I scarce know; but it is talked of, sir, and

the Junker is often at the castle, and sometimes Freiherr von Burgstein laughs loud and is well pleased by his lording it; and then again he is angry and swears he will have no cockerel crowing in his courtyard.'

'You know much of what passes at the castle?'

'I am often there, sir, for Walther is very kind to me, and Heinrich the armourer lets me help to furbish up the head-pieces and breast-plates, and help him in the forge. And the little lady often comes there with her waiting-maid, and claps her hands to see the sparks fly; or she bids me show her the suits of mail and the weapons that hang in the hall, and tell her all I can of them; and I know every dent in them, for Heinrich has told me who wore them, and in what fights and tourneys.'

The boy's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and his colour rose with eagerness. Pfarrer Basil shook his head, smiling, and said, looking to Magdalene: 'A wild hawk, Frau; one day you will have to loose the jesses.'

'Yes, it may well be so, reverend sir; I do but wait till the time comes,' she answered, calmly, little guessing when and how it would come, nor how steeped in bitterness it would be.

CHAPTER V.

THE times had almost gone by when the country nobility held it their born right to capture travellers and put them to ransom, or disturb markets and plunder burgher folk. The Swabian League came down with a heavy hand on such marauders, and public opinion began to set strongly against them, though here and there some audacious Götz von Berlichingen still defied League and Kaiser, and sent feud letters to his fellow nobles, or even to such proud cities as Nüremberg; or lay in wait for travellers returning from one of those great shooting matches which had taken the place of tournaments, and robbed them of the prizes they had won; or seized and

put to ransom the messenger of some rich prelate. The position of the nobles was an uneasy one in this transition time. There was no natural or healthy outlet for them in the State; they hated the new system of government which stopped their highway robbery, and fostered peace, and blindly struggled against the downfall of their long uncontested supremacy, and against the growing importance of the burgher class. The towns were rising to a formidable independence, enriched by increasing trade and commanding the luxuries which intercourse with the New World was introducing, while the nobles grew poorer, and, at once envious and disdainful of the riches and luxury of the citizens, sought to augment their revenues by the only means now in their power, grinding all they could out of their peasants. Thus, whatever happened, whether the towns grew rich or the nobles poor, the peasantry only suffered more and more; and, although the cities on the whole sympathised with them, because the nobles were unpopular, hardly a voice was ever raised on their behalf. Although the scarcity of labourers after the Black Death swept over Germany made the peasants more valuable, they were considered as existing merely to serve the higher classes. They had no rights, no claims, no individual existence. Sometimes their lord lived among them, like Baron Burgstein; sometimes they were at the mercy of a bailiff, viceroy of an absent master, as on the Geyer'schen lands, whose owner either lived in his own house at Fulda, or followed the Emperor in his wars; but it made little difference. The peasant was not absolutely tied to the land, except in rare cases. But this advantaged him little, so crushing were taxes and dues, so powerless was he to appeal against the most flagrant injustice. Perhaps those were a little the worst off who had absentee lords, and this was an increasing evil, for the nobles began more and more to live in towns, or attach themselves to princely houses. Schloss Geyer was almost always empty, unless occupied by that Graf von Lichtenberg of whom Hildemund had spoken to Father Basil, and this was not seldom. He was a man

altogether of the new time—crafty, politic, secret, and ambitious. At one time he had been but a poor younger brother, but the death of two nephews had made him heir to a considerable estate. He was not popular, yet many men of high rank and position found him a useful ally, and he had known how to make himself valuable to the Swabian League, and acquire the favour of the Bishop of Würtzburg. It was a time when a keen and sagacious politician might hope to attain almost anything. Had not the Brandenburg family gradually raised themselves to power whose future height no one could calculate? Already one was a markgraf, another Archbishop of Mainz, and a third of Magdeburg; while the fourth was Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. Why should not von Lichtenberg be equally successful? Policy, not war, was his forte; he had nothing in common with the rough fierce generation just gone by; he preferred to attain his ends peaceably, though he had no scruple in removing anyone or anything which stood in his way by the readiest means. His powers of scheming were so great that he would have been a far more successful and dangerous man than he was but for his esteeming them so highly that he often undervalued an adversary. More than once this had spoiled a well-woven plan, but he had not yet learned his lesson. There was yet another danger in his road. His son, for whom he planned and schemed unweariedly, was of quite another type to himself, and might probably upset all the fabric so laboriously reared. It seemed as if Wolfgang von Lichtenberg reproduced some ancestor, fierce, wild, and cruel, haughty alike to equals and inferiors, with ungoverned passions and a rude sense of honour, which made him an instrument altogether unfit to his father's hand. Such as he was, however, the Graf set all his hopes upon him, and foresaw a brilliant future for his fierce wolf-cub, the first step to which was his marriage to the little heiress of the Burgsteins. Freiherr von Burgstein was not one of the impoverished country nobles. He had married a rich heiress, and

had lived on his lands, followed the chase, drank deeply, and let his revenues accumulate, caring little about them, and hardly aware of his own wealth. But his cousin, Graf Lichtenberg, could have enlightened him. The two men had nothing in common but the bond of kinship, and it was no small proof of the dexterity with which Von Lichtenberg could deal with those whom his interest bade him please that he was on good terms with his cousin, who prided himself on being a man of the old times, and allowing nothing new-fangled to come near him. The very faults of Wolfgang, his violence and insolence, were more acceptable to the Baron than Von Lichtenberg's more polished and courteous manners; but the Graf exercised a power over him to which he reluctantly submitted, and had come to believe the project for the marriage of his little daughter with his cousin's son his own devising. The Lichtenbergs were his next heirs after this girl, whose sex was a never-ceasing vexation to him, and no alliance could have seemed fitter. Yet in his heart he did not like it, and there were moments when he wished angrily that he had any excuse for breaking off the project. Graf Lichtenberg was well aware of this, but he trusted to his own diplomacy and to the Baron's well-known tenacity in any project once favoured by him to keep all secure, and he pressed for a speedy betrothal, for though the boy was scarce fifteen and the girl but eight years old, they were by no means too young for this bond according to the ideas of the time. It was the Graf who paid all the attentions to the little bride elect. The boy, with strength and passions beyond his age or his control, and with no touch of chivalry to soften him towards the child-bride, either neglected her scornfully or treated her as his chattel, with a rude familiarity highly displeasing to the little maiden, who equally resented his domineering and his condescension, entertaining her father hugely by her outbursts of fiery indignation, and making him prophesy, with shouts of laughter, that one day Junker Wolfgang would find himself under his wife's slipper. 'I will wring her neck

first,' the boy would mutter, glaring on the little offender with his great gloomy eyes, and the old seneschal, who loved the child better than his life, would shake his head and inwardly augur ill for his darling. There were others who misliked the prospect too—the pale sickly Freifrau, who had given no male heir to the family, and counted for little more than a shadow in the castle, dreaded the alliance, but dared say no word to cross her husband, and it was looked forward to with deep aversion by the retainers, who foresaw an ill master in the young Graf, who already treated them with rough and haughty insolence. No one liked him less than Hildemund, when he chanced to come across him, and Wolfgang on his side honoured the Bannwart's son with a very special aversion. Hildemund was gentle, but he was fearless, and his quiet indifference to the young noble's insolence was insufferable. Hildemund regarded him with a spice of contempt for his uncouthness and violence, shrugged his shoulders at his unmannerliness, and passed out of his way, thinking no more about him; but Wolfgang felt towards this boy, whom he could not seize and crush, a fierce longing to have him at his mercy, and see him made to suffer, to cry out for pity, which sooner or later must break all bounds.

Although Hildemund was free born and inherited peculiar immunity from taxes and dues, yet the gulf between the Bannwart's son and the young noble was far too deep and wide in days when birth counted as a divine thing, for it to be possible for Hildemund to call Graf Wolfgang to account for anything he might please to say or do, and this could not be but galling to a boy high-spirited, if gentle; and Hildemund heartily wished that he might not find him at Schloss Burgstein, as he climbed the steep upward way thither with the bird which he had tamed for the little Rosilde. He was very fond of the little Freifräulein, whose imperious baby ways lent her in his eyes but a charm the more, contrasting as they did with the small figure and childish features, which made her look much younger even than she was.

Dornröschen, indeed, 'a rosebud set with little wilful thorns,' but a rosebud still, full of sweet promise in his eyes and in those of old Walther the seneschal, the last blossom on the ancient Burgstein stem, too precious to be plucked by so rude a hand as that of Wolfgang von Lichtenberg.

Schloss Burgstein stood as if part of its rock, so inaccessible, so proudly overlooking the valley below, that there was little need for watch or ward; but if stricter guard had been kept, Hildemund would have entered unchallenged, for he was known to everyone in its precincts, and he passed into the courtyard exchanging greetings with the retainers who happened to be there, and noting that grooms were holding the horses of the Graf von Lichtenberg and his son, while Kunz, the favourite attendant of the Graf, was saddling his own, as if for speedy departure. Hildemund offered no greeting to this man, whom he knew by reputation to be the Graf's *âme damnée*, and Kunz paid him no attention as he passed, but continued to saddle and bridle his horse without a word to anyone. He was a short, swart, broad-shouldered fellow, silent and surly. The Graf seldom went anywhere without him. Hildemund went towards the great hall doorway, close to which he saw the seneschal, sitting on an oaken settle in the sun, with a large boarhound at his feet. Walther had served two generations of Burgsteins, and had been in many battles with the late lord, bringing thence honourable wounds, which had won him the appellation of the Scarred Face. His hair was grey, and he was stiff with age, but his blue eyes were still bright and his strength still considerable. His hearty voice welcomed Hildemund while yet at a distance.

'Ho, lad! thou here? Hast brought the bird this time? My little lady asks for it each day. That is well, and a dainty little dompfaff it is,' as Hildemund opened the door of the cage in which he had brought his pet. 'Where is she? She and Barbara were here but now. Bärbele, I say! Nay, then, I will go myself and seek her. Look to your work, lazy loons!' he

shouted across the court to a group of men idling near the Graf's horses. 'Here, Barbara girl! where are you?'

Barbara was his grandchild, and waiting-maid to the little Fräulein. No one answering, he rose and went to seek the child. Hildemund restored the bird to its cage, and waited. From a distance came the ringing clang of the armourer's hammer. Hildemund could almost guess by its varied sound when he put aside a breastplate and began to mend a gorget, or laid that aside for a spear or cross-bolt. Horses were stamping, grooms talking, steps passing, dogs barking and clinking their chains, all mingling into a hum of sound and busy life. Tired of waiting, Hildemund entered the hall. The great room was empty, to his surprise. There was a huge table in the middle, with a long, heavy bench on each side, and settles fixed against the walls. At the further end was a smaller table, with a cover thrown over it, and a couple of leathern chairs with green cushions; near them was a smaller one for the little Rosilde. The windows were filled with painted glass, with armorial bearings alternating with scenes from battle and tourney. In the angles of the walls were great iron-bound cupboards; dim old family pictures hung grimly here and there among helmets and shields and armour, some dinted and dark with age and use, some inlaid with gold and very costly, testified to the wealth of the Burgsteins, for only the richest of the nobles owned such mail, or possessed such swords with hilts adorned with gold and precious stones. Hildemund knew them all, as he had told Pfarrer Basil, and his eyes sought them as if they were old friends. No one came, but he thought he heard voices in an inner room, that of the Freiherr rising stormily, and another, persuasive and cautious, that of von Lichtenberg; and the boarhound heard them too, and lifted its head now and then uneasily, growling low. Hildemund stooped to caress it, and it looked affectionately at him, and beat its tail hard on the ground by way of answer, for though fierce and uncertain of temper, like all of its

race, it was devoted to Hildemund, whom it had known ever since it was a puppy, with a foolish face and large soft paws, staggering under its attempts to walk. He and the little Rosilde could do what they would with it, though it would growl menacingly if anyone else, even its master the Freiherr, meddled with it. To Wolfgang it always showed such aversion that old Walther declared he must have threatened it, and that it never forgot or forgave a threat. Struck it he certainly had not, or he would scarce have been alive to tell of it. Their hatred was mutual, and a suppressed but angry growl first warned Hildemund that Wolfgang was near. He came through the hall, riding-whip in hand, his hat with the black and white feathers of Lichtenberg shading his eyes, but he pushed it back with a haughty and impatient gesture as he caught sight of Hildemund, and said, curtly, 'What art loitering here for? Get to thy fellows in the courtyard.'

Hildemund flushed hotly, but answered with courtesy that he was awaiting Walther's return.

'What hast there? Give it hither,' said Wolfgang, noticing the cage in Hildemund's hand. 'Dost hear me?'

'Pardon me, sir, but this bird is not mine; it is long promised to the Lady Rosilde,' said Hildemund, well aware that a live creature in Wolfgang's hands would leave them either maimed or dead.

'Give it here, I say,' repeated the boy, advancing a step; 'am I to speak twice?'

He lifted his whip threateningly, and Hildemund's spirit rose.

'I have said the bird is the Burgfräulein's, sir, and I give it to no other hand than hers,' he said.

'Take that, then, for thy discourtesy,' shouted the young noble, crimson with rage, and while he struck furiously at Hildemund with one hand, he sought to seize the cage with the other. Springing lightly aside Hildemund avoided the lash, and at the same instant he opened the cage door, and the bird fluttered up into the air in wild alarm. The baffled Wolfgang flung himself

upon him, and gripped him in a frenzy of rage such as his slender opponent could not attempt to resist.

'I will kill you, base varlet,' he muttered; 'hey, how like you this?'

Hildemund was at his mercy, but an unexpected ally was at hand. With a long growl the boarhound reared himself up, and sprang on Hildemund's assailant. Well was it for Wolfgang that his doublet was thickly padded, for the beast's teeth met in it, and though he flung Hildemund from him, and struggled with all his bull-like strength to shake himself free, it was in vain, until both Hildemund and the seneschal hurrying up, peremptorily ordered the dog to let go. Even then he loosed his hold slowly and sullenly. Wolfgang stood glaring at it for an instant, as it couched in reluctant obedience, still growling, and with angry eyes fixed upon him. Then, with so rapid a movement that no one foresaw what he was about to do, he drew his dagger, and plunged it up to the hilt in the dog's throat. 'So, thou hast thy meed,' he said, savagely, and thrusting the animal with his foot as it fell in a death struggle before him. 'Wilt bite me again, thou beast? Aye, moan, moan again! I like to hear thee. Bite if thou canst now, accursed brute. What, thou dost need another stroke? Take it, then. Keep off, master seneschal, or you may come in for one also now my hand is in. Ha! Rosilde! come here and see a fair sight!'

'Sir, sir, what have you done?' cried the seneschal: 'my lord will never pardon this. His favourite hound! Ah, my little lady, here is sad work!'

'What has he done, that wicked Wolfgang?' cried the childish voice, full of pity and anger, as the little one ran up, outstripping her maid. 'Hundolf! oh, poor Hundolf! poor Hundolf!' and she flung herself over the dog, which lifted its dim eyes to her and feebly tried to lick her hand, even while it shivered in death.

'Did you do this?' she cried, standing up, with her eyes flashing through tears as she faced the boy, who answered, with a laugh—

'Aye did I, and would again. You will not have the beast to save you from my hands next time,' he added, turning savagely on Hildemund, who answered by a glance of unconcealed dislike and contempt.

'This is ill done, Junker,' said Walther, gravely and sternly; 'how befell it?'

'I have no reckoning to give to you that I wot of,' retorted Wolfgang; 'I will answer it to your lord.'

'And that you shall! There he comes. Herr father! See here! Come!'

She darted past old Walther, who would have detained her, and flew to meet her father, whose heavy steps were now heard as he strode into the hall, with Graf Lichtenberg beside him, seeking to silence if not to calm him.

'Talk not to me of the Swabian League or of the Brandenburgs,' he was exclaiming. 'Out on the burgher pack! I loathe the very name of them. What, put down Duke Ulrich to set them higher? I tell you he shall know it all before I am a week older. How now? What is it, my girl? What!'

'My lord is ill-pleased already, and when he sees this work,' muttered Walther, in great anxiety, as he saw the Freiherr stride forward and stand speechless, while he gathered the sense of the child's passionate accusations.

'So it has pleased you to slay my best hound, young sir,' he said, at last, his face flushing dark-red through all the sunburns which browned cheeks and forehead, as he looked alternately at the dead animal and Wolfgang, who stood in sullen defiance.

'The beast turned on me,' he answered.

'So! And why did it thus?'

'Because, if I needs must answer your questions, my lord, I sought to chastise yonder knave, who was saucy, and the beast took part with him.'

'He had brought me my bird, and it is lost!' cried Rosilde, through wrathful tears.

'Peace, my young mistress. So, Junker, you play

the master here—already!' thundered the Freiherr, his wrath breaking all bounds. ''Tis full soon. A gentle lord he will make one of these days. What say you, Walther? Tush, cousin, spare me your fair words,' as the Graf sought to interpose. 'Can I not see how it will be with my vassals, and lands, and moneys when you and your son have the rule here? Truly the League and the Brandenburgers may pray for that day. Aye, but it is not come yet—no, nor shall. Waste no more soft speeches, cousin of Lichtenberg, my mind is made up. My little lass is not for your son; he crosses my threshold no more. Get you gone, boy, for I can scarce keep my hands off you. Get you gone, I say!'

'I go, sir, and there was small need to bid me not return where a hound and a saucy varlet are held more dear than plighted word and noble blood.'

'Art mad, boy?' exclaimed his father, who had repeatedly tried to interpose. 'Good cousin——'

'My lord, it is but a boy!' urged Walther, as, after a pause of utter amazement the Freiherr made a stride forward to inflict summary punishment there and then on the offender; 'and under your own roof!'

'Aye, that is true, and the young rascal has courage. To beard me to my face! Yet I like that better than—— No, I will hear no more, cousin; you have my answer, and what I said that I shall do, were you fifty times my kinsman. So you are warned. You had better follow your son, who is mounting even now in the courtyard. So he goes, and I am well rid of him. Poor beast, I would cover thee with gold if I could buy thy like again,' he said, looking down sorrowfully at the noble hound lying before him. 'How came all this evil, boy? Speak freely.'

Hildemund told the tale as briefly as he could, and the Freiherr's face darkened again.

'All for a silly fowl! Why didst not let the Junker have his way?'

'The bird was promised to the Lady Rosilde, my lord,' Hildemund answered respectfully but fearlessly;

'and, moreover, I would not see anything that could suffer in the power of the young Graf.'

'I hate him! I will not marry him! Poor Hundolf!' cried Rosilde; 'and my lady mother will not that I should.'

'How now, Mistress Malapert?' said the Freiherr, with a frown. 'I have yet to see thy mother or anyone else question my will and pleasure.'

'But it is not your pleasure that he should come back. You said so, and you cannot take it back, Herr father. Ah, see my little bird!' she cried, with a sudden change to ecstasy, and clapping her little hands, as she saw the bird, more alarmed by unwonted liberty than by any danger which could befall it in captivity, come fluttering down from a helmet on which it had perched to Hildemund's shoulder. Her unwelcome suitor was forgotten at once; she was half consoled even for the poor hound's death. While Hildemund showed off her new pet, and she called her maid to hear how to treat it, the Freiherr was saying apart to his trusted old retainer—

'Thou wilt scarce guess what von Lichtenberg urged on me, and hardly would take a refusal. He would have me keep it secret, I trow, but I am no treason-keeper for him or any other. It seems that the League, whose very name is gall in my mouth, and the Brandenburgers have tidings that Duke Ulrich has a plan toward for the gaining back of his duchy, and they would lay an ambush and seize him, as once they sought to do before.'

'Ah, false villains!' muttered the old seneschal. 'Have they not worked him ill enough already?'

'It would seem they think not so, and my fair cousin sees a fair occasion to gain favour with the pack of them. Would anyone think he had blood as noble as my own in his veins, Walther? But so it is, and he has pledged himself to bring men and moneys to aid in this excellent device. But men he cannot get without money, and money he has not, so he comes to me!—to me!' repeated the Freiherr with an angry laugh, 'and reasons so

sweetly that honey is nothing to it. At first I knew not whither he was tending, and well nigh promised all he desired; but so encouraged, he spoke more plainly and the thing grew clear to me, and I gave him plainer words than he liked; he blenched and grew as white as a priest's alb. I was a fool ever to trust a man who looks as if he lived on the seven lean kine of Egypt,' said the burly Freiherr, striking his own broad chest.

'But is all indeed over between you, my lord?' asked the old seneschal anxiously.

'Aye, so I think. I got hot, and small marvel, and swore that my girl was not for son of his since he sided with the burghers against a noble lord like Ulrich, for whatever the Duke may have done he is one of us—and this matter of the poor hound came as if to clench it.'

'And the Duke, my lord?'

'He must be warned, and that right soon. We hunt the boar to-morrow, and then hey for Hohentwiel. Have the poor beast yonder buried quickly, Walther. I would I had lost any but Hundolf, my best hound, and fond of the little one. Dost remember how gentle he ever was with her, and how when scarce more than a babe she would ride round the hall on his back? 'Tis a brave little lass and a sweet,' he added, with a touch of unusual tenderness, as he looked at the child standing smiling before Hildemund, her bird on her finger, while her maid stood respectfully behind her. 'Pity she is but a girl!'

'Nay, my good lord, she is the sweetest blossom that ever the rose of Burgstein bore,' said the seneschal, looking with fond pride at his little liege lady.

'But a girl! nothing but a girl! and the old name falls to the distaff,' answered the Freiherr, and turned gloomily away.

Meanwhile the two Lichtenbergs, closely followed by their attendant, Kunz, were riding down the steep and difficult way from the castle. Not a word passed till the walls were far overhead and they had reached comparatively level ground, for while Wolfgang was

swelling with injured pride and passion, his father was striving to master alarm and anger—anger directed as much against himself as his son, for he felt with keen mortification that he had made a false move, and played his game like a very novice, overrating his own powers of persuasion, and forgetting how obstinate and irritable were the prejudices of the man whom he sought to bend to his purpose. He kept silence, knowing his son's temper, and secretly dreading to produce an outburst from Wolfgang, who in certain moods was beyond his control, though in calmer moments the lad had a certain awe of the father so unlike himself, who never lost the rein of self-control, and attained his ends so skilfully—too skilfully the boy, honest if brutal, might learn to think. When at last, impressed by the entire absence of reproach or remark, he looked half-defiantly, half-questioningly at the Graf, he was struck by his paleness and the set look about his lips. It never occurred to his limited intelligence that there might be other matters of disquiet beyond what regarded his own conduct, and he muttered, 'I would I had killed the saucy rogue; he had been rightly served.'

It was meant rather as a conciliatory advance than as defiance, though it did not sound like it.

'And I would you had chosen another time to chafe von Burgstein,' was the Graf's cold and quiet reply.

'Never will I enter his gates again! I know not, sir, how you endured to see your son rated like a hound before groom and squire. I saw their saucy looks right well. I cross that threshold no more while the Freiherr lives.'

'So think I too, and so topples over the fair scheme I had built up for thee.'

'I care not; but if I did I would have the girl yet. She is mine, and unless with my good will neither king nor kaiser shall have her.'

'Save your wild and hurling words, boy,' was the Graf's contemptuous answer, 'and ride on, for I have to speak to Kunz here, and he who cannot rule himself is no company for grown men. Ride forward.'

Keenly stung, but honest enough to feel the rebuke deserved, Wolfgang revenged himself on his horse, striking it sharply and repeatedly, making it rear and plunge and carry him far ahead at a break-neck gallop. His father looked after him frowning, with a gesture of discouragement. 'A wild bull and no more; he should be von Burgstein's son, not mine,' he muttered to himself in bitterness of spirit. 'What fortunes so sure and strongly built but they may be overthrown by such a witling? Yet a man can but work with what stuff he has, and truly I myself have arrantly played the fool in laying myself open to Dietrich; yet who would have thought that a fish whom, plunge as he might, I have ever landed at last, would thus baffle me? Hark ye, Kunz,' he continued aloud, beckoning his attendant to ride beside him; 'my tongue has tripped to-day in speaking too freely to Dietrich von Burgstein, led on by his seeming assent, and seeing not that he listened so calmly only because he took not my meaning. Now will he set forth as soon as his boar hunt is over and babble all I told him to Duke Ulrich.'

'What ill can a banished man do you, my lord?'

'Tut! I fear not Ulrich, but the fiend was in my tongue when I intrusted the secrets of Kasimir of Brandenburg and the League to this kinsman of mine. If I turn him not from his purpose I may count my head laid under the doomster's axe. His star has ever been malignant to mine.'

'If it be thus, he must not go.'

'No, he must not go. I will seek speech with him to-morrow when he rides to the chase, and try to repair the folly I have wrought. But I know him; even if the thought of the sport left room for aught else in his mind, he would be harder to turn aside than yonder rocks, taking the matter as he does.'

'He shall not go, my lord.'

'Nay, nay, wish no ill to my kinsman, Kunz, though true it is that the boar is a perilous beast to chase, and the sport is dangerous. But we must walk warily lest we find ourselves in deeper slough than ever.'

'No ill, surely, unless to hinder a worse one, noble sir.'

His master made no answer. Words were needless and might be dangerous. He fell to thinking of the peril he had fallen into, and of his immediate and pressing need for a large sum of money, for he knew well that to fail in what he promised the League and the Markgrave would be to show himself not worth their bidding for, and deal a fatal blow to his own ambitious hopes. He thought, too, of the breakdown of his plans for eventually securing the wealth and lands of Burgstein to his son, for even if, as was little likely, the Freiherr could be soothed into renewing the project of the marriage between Wolfgang and Rosilde, the Graf knew his son too well to hope that he would recall his vow never again to enter the house where he had been mortified before the household. Only if the Freiherr were no more its lord could that project be put into execution. Then, indeed . . . Graf Lichtenberg rode on in silence.

CHAPTER VI.

It had not been without reason that Graf Lichtenberg had counted on co-operation from his kinsman in the schemes which involved further misfortune to the banished Duke of Würtemberg. Had the Burgsteins owned no lands but the wild forest district around their castle, they must have only counted among the innumerable poor nobles of Germany, but marriage had brought them large possessions in the fair and fertile duchy, and thence the main portion of their wealth was derived.

The high-handed dealings of Duke Ulrich, which had brought the League down upon him and made rebels of the greater part of his subjects, were highly distasteful to the Freiherr, who, though holding aloof from the rebellion which had driven Ulrich to fly from his duchy to the distant fortress of Hohentwiel, would rail so loudly against him that Lichtenberg was led into

believing his wrath against the Duke greater than his haughty aversion to what he called 'the burgher pack.' It was not so, however; whatever Ulrich's offences, he was lord and Duke, and it seemed monstrous treason to his order that a knight and noble should lend himself to the plans of the League and Brandenburgers, and betray a sovereign into the hands of low-born enemies. Night and sleep intensified rather than lessened the Freiherr's hot displeasure, and it was hot, indeed, as Walther the seneschal did not fail to remark, since it was hardly diverted by his favourite sport of hunting the wild boar.

In the fresh early morning he rode down from the castle, and drew rein at the foot of the Burgstein in the valley. Walther had to remain at home with a few reluctant companions to keep the castle in his lord's absence, but every groom and man-at-arms who could obtain leave to go was there, rejoicing over the variety in the monotonous daily life of the household. Numerous peasants were also in attendance, ordered out to beat the coverts, and though it was felt as a hardship that some of the few free days left them by Church festivals and their lord's usual claims should be taken from them whenever their services were needed in the chase, there was satisfaction in the slaughter of some of the chief enemies of their crops, and the boar hunt was so full of perilous chances, so dangerous both to sportsmen and dogs, as to excite the peasants, who ran comparatively no risk, almost as much as the huntsmen. Old men and women crept out to see the start; children stood in open-eyed delight; nay, it was not certain but that Pfarrer Basil himself was standing in his doorway. Certainly his old housekeeper was looking over the fir hedge of the churchyard. Hildemund came running up just as the little train rode down from the castle; he had heard the day before that the chase would take place with sunrise, and had persuaded his mother to let him join it. Frau Magdalene consented readily; she steadily encouraged the boy in all the manly exercises within his reach, and Hildemund, light of foot as a

young roe, and knowing the country perfectly, would follow the chase on foot for a whole day unweariedly, thereby often gaining the hearty commendation of the Freiherr, to whom nothing in the world was so dear as this sport. His brow cleared, and his voice rang out cheerily as he listened to the reports of his chief huntsman, gave his orders and called to his dogs, powerful greyhounds, such as Snyders loved to paint, with long wise faces, and tails proudly arched over their backs, only waiting for the signal either to plunge into the deep coverts east of the Burgstein, where wolf and boar lurked as in a fastness, or to breast and climb the pile of rocks on the north, a more inaccessible fortress still, and fill the forest with the 'gallant chiding' which would tell that the prey was unharboured.

If Graf Lichtenberg intended to have a word with his cousin there was no time to lose, for once the chase begun, not for the kaiser himself would the Freiherr have paused. It was with the angry impatience of a man brought back to an unwelcome subject from which he had escaped that he saw the Graf ride up, followed by Kunz, and he cut short all greeting with, 'Join the chase, an you will, cousin of Lichtenberg, though you are not apt to love it overmuch, but no more words. It stands as I have said. I go to the Hohentwiel with the morrow's dawn. Thanks to that Junker of yours I go to the chase without my poor Hundolf to-day. It sorely mars my pleasure; I can get me a son-in-law when I will, but never another hound like my poor brute which he slew. On to the Hunenstein, my men; we will lay on the dogs there.'

Riders and runners obeyed with alacrity; Graf Lichtenberg shot a glance bright and keen as the blade of a poignard at Kunz, whose swarthy face made no response, though he understood perfectly. That dull, impassive look of his was one recommendation in his master's eyes. They followed the huntsmen leisurely until near the rendezvous, when the 'sweet thunder' of all the dogs' mellow voices told that the chase had begun,

and down the up-piled rocks of the Hunenstein came three wild pigs, frantic with alarm, leaping like goats with incredible activity and sureness from stone to stone, and plunging headlong, with the pack after them, into a dense tangle of broom, wild clematis, and brushwood. The screams of affrighted jays and magpies, the deep bell-like voices of the hounds, the cheers of the huntsmen, echoed and re-echoed from the rocks, and filled the air long after all were out of sight, and an eagle, which had soared up far above the tumult, was slowly preparing to return to her nest again.

The taunt which the Freiherr had flung at his cousin —one in his mouth so bitter that it testified to extreme ill-humour—was absolutely just. Von Lichtenberg was no sportsman by nature, in this as in all else belonging to another time and race than his kinsman, while his son loved the chase passionately, exulting in the rapid motion, the various risks, the terror and the death of his victims, and was now sullenly raging at home because both pride and his father's commands forbade his joining in the sport. But as means to an end Graf Lichtenberg would become as keen a sportsman as anyone, and he kept near enough to the Freiherr through all the changes and chances of the sport to obtain more than one opportunity for speaking with him, in the pauses when a boar had been killed or had baffled its pursuers, as more than once happened, by disappearing in some impenetrable jungle, or among the rocks, in some secret cave where the dogs failed to find it, or found it only to perish on its tusks. But all he got was a look cast over the Freiherr's shoulder, and a curt, 'It stands as I have said.'

Kunz, too, had kept up with his master, and he was still near, though his horse began to show signs of distress when the sun was at its noonday height, and a huge boar was discovered basking in the heat on a rocky plateau, with copsewood clothing its sides and dense forests for leagues around. At the same moment a couple of young pigs crossed the track, and although two of the best and most experienced hounds continued to climb

the rocks, all the rest of the pack and every huntsman in sight followed them except the Freiherr, who saw them go with a laugh, delighted to keep this crowning piece of sport to himself, and give this formidable foe the deathblow unaided. Looking round for a moment he saw Von Lichtenberg ride up along a charcoal burner's path. 'See, cousin!' he shouted, all his good humour momentarily restored; 'rare sport! The beast will take to the Eschthal, my word for it. Look! there he comes! A "solitary," and of the biggest—I mark him for mine. Well done, good dogs! Farewell, cousin! this is my way, but I counsel you not to follow.' And horse and man went crashing down through the trees towards the lonely valley known as the Eschthal, whither long experience enabled the Freiherr rightly to divine that the beast would make its way. The laugh and voice was borne back by the wind. Graf Lichtenberg looked at his companion.

'The beast will turn to bay in the Eschthal,' he said. 'He cannot keep up this pace long, but since he is for none but the Freiherr I will even join the rest. Do as thou wilt.'

'Aye,' said Kunz, and dismounting he fastened his horse deliberately to a tree, and made for the Eschthal by a shorter way, impossible for a mounted man even so reckless as the Freiherr. Graf Lichtenberg set his lips fast as he rode rapidly away, guided by the distant sounds to the main body of the sportsmen, who were now in full career, in a comparatively open part of the forest, with the prey in full view, and far too much bent on their sport even to notice the absence of the Freiherr, and the Graf, who rejoined them unobserved, while his kinsman was galloping in a contrary direction towards the Eschthal.

Never had 'his bosom's lord' sat so 'lightly on his throne' as now, when galloping under the forest trees by the shortest cuts that his horse could take, guided by the cry of the two gallant hounds, his heavy horn at his back, his hunting-knife at his side, the sunbeams shining on the tree tops, and gliding through the

branches on mossy ground or strong green fern, in whose broad fronds russet and yellow tints were showing here and there, telling of autumn. Presently the cry of the dogs changed into a sharper, angrier note, telling that they were pressing the boar hard, and the Freiherr smiled, well pleased that the brave hounds should justify his prediction, and bring the beast to bay exactly as he had foreseen.

The Eschthal was a valley overhung with rocks and crowned with forest, singularly wild and solitary, although but a mile from the spot where the Bannwart's house had been built. A shallow limpid stream flowed through it, with a stretch of green short turf on the nearer side. But a little way further lay a dense covert, so dark and tangled and marshy that could the boar reach it he would probably baffle his enemies and return leisurely to his lair, getting back as soon as possible, as the manner of this creature is, to the track already traversed that day. But when the Freiherr came crashing down the precipitous side of the valley, with small regard for man or horse, he saw that the beast had swum the stream, and was standing at bay against a rock, half buried in the soft soil, its back arched until the long black bristles stood up all along it, its eyes glaring in terror and fury. The two hounds were swimming as near it as they could, seeking in vain to seize it, but undaunted, though now and then the boar turned its head with a fierce and sudden movement, and struck furiously with its formidable tusks; and even as the Freiherr sprang from his horse, sounding the call upon his horn which gave notice that the game was at bay, he saw one of the dogs caught on the long sharp tusks and tossed bleeding and gashed into the current.

'St. Eustace!' shouted the wrathful Freiherr, unsheathing his hunting knife, and advancing into the stream, ready to give his blow before the boar could charge him, with the sure and fearless stroke of a practised huntsman. But even as he raised the gleaming blade, a short boar spear flew from an unseen hand, and struck him on the side of the head, and he dropped

prone on the very tusks of the charging beast, which struck savagely at him again and again, and then, dashing the second hound aside, rushed out of the stream and disappeared into the forest. An instant later a man who had stolen up, stooped over the prostrate figure, and stirred it with the spear, as if to make sure that life was gone, then as swiftly retired. The valley seemed quite empty, but for the corpse lying in the shallow water which flowed over it; not a sound broke the stillness but its flow. The evil deed seemed to have been done unseen, unknown. It was not so, however. From an opening in the rocks there came a figure so strange and spectral that it appeared the fitting witness of so unnatural a crime. Wrapped from head to foot in a pale garment of some coarse material, even the face so covered that only the dark gleaming eyes were visible, it might have been some ghost condemned to wander in penance within this solitary valley, had not the Lazarus-rattle in the hand told that this was one of those outcasts from mankind over whom the burial service had been read even while they lived, who were counted as dead to family and friends, and shunned even by those bound to works of charity and mercy, the wretched company of lepers. The muffled figure stood at the edge of the stream, looking down at the body lying under the rippling water, but made no movement to touch it; a leper might not defile even the dead by his touch. But a moment later Hildemund came headlong down the rocks, and reached the stream with a breathless cry of horror.

'My lord—slain! slain! Ah, my dear lord! The boar—no, never boar mastered him! Ulfric, how chanced this?'

'Hast no guess?' was the answer.

'None, none. Mary mother, how ripped he is and gashed!' exclaimed the boy, as he drew with much difficulty the heavy lifeless body to the bank, and knelt beside it. 'Ah, my good lord, what evil news for Burgstein!'

'Think you this is all a wild boar's work?' said the

leper, significantly. Hildemund looked up suddenly, then down again at the dead man, whose hat had fallen off and floated away. He saw a deep wound on one temple.

'Did boar-tusk do that?' he asked, doubtfully; 'or fell he on a sharp stone? or what befell?'

'Nay, rather ask one who went but now away, swart and broad-shouldered, who came to fetch his boar-spear.'

'Kunz, the Graf's squire?'

'Aye, even so,' answered the leper; and Hildemund, in his horror and amazement, forgot to note that the name seemed perfectly familiar to him.

'Kunz!' he repeated, aghast. 'But then——'

'Hist! the hunt comes this way; doubtless they heard afar the Freiherr's horn; it were not well we were seen. Back into the bushes, and come not forth while they are here for your life, but return to me when all are gone,' said the leper; and Hildemund obeyed instantly. The leper retired into his cave, whence, unsuspected, he could observe all which took place. He heard the distant shouts and laughter, and the fall of the horses' hoofs muffled on the turf as the troop rode gaily down the valley, and noted the sudden check of surprise as they espied the Freiherr's horse running loose, and heard the startled outcries as one after another sprang from his saddle and gathered round the dead man. The clear tones of the Graf came distinctly to his ear, and made him start as with a sudden sharp pain: 'No boar's work this, my masters; the beast must have charged him after he fell. Belike it was a stroke as he plunged overheated in the water.'

'Aye, so it must have been,' said the head huntsman, with sincere regret; 'and there lies poor Griffin, dead also; and I see not Gunther; either the good hound is dead also, or away after the boar. An evil day! Who shall tell my lady?'

'That must I, and a sorrowful task it is in good sooth,' said the Graf; and everyone recollected that all which stood between him and the lordship and lands of Burgstein was a child, destined, until the quarrel

between himself and the Freiherr, to be his daughter-in-law. It seemed but right and natural that he should give all commands, and the men looked involuntarily to him for orders.

'Level your spears,' he said to four of them; 'the body must be borne back to the castle. How now, Kunz!'

He started as the little crowd moved apart, and he perceived his man-at-arms standing livid and trembling near the dead body. 'Aye, man, 'tis a sorry sight, but what makest thou here without thy horse? Hast had a fall? Art hurt? Come here and answer me,' he added, sternly, as the fellow continued to gaze stupidly on the corpse.

'I—I fell,' he muttered, 'on the rocks yonder.'

'Thou art dazed, sirrah!' said his master, sharply. 'Hast fallen on thy head? Doubtless thou didst hear the Freiherr's horn like ourselves—wast not behind me?—and hurried over rashly down these rocky banks. Was it so?'

'Aye, my lord,' answered Kunz, feeling the power of the look bent on him, which seemed to constrain him to reply as his master willed, though he kept casting furtive and terrified glances towards the dead body.

'His wits are astray,' said the Graf, contemptuously. 'I thought thy skull thick enough to be proof against blow or bullet. Where is thy horse? Fell he, too? So! Then the wolves will have him ere night. No, no, let none waste time in seeking him; would no worse loss had befallen us. Move on, my masters.'

The four men raised their dead lord on their boar-spears, and the train moved slowly on, in silence, or speaking under their breath, while the bright sunshine poured down upon them, and earth and sky were full of pitiless and joyous beauty. Peasants, left behind by the riders, gradually joined the mournful little party, and learned with wonder and some regret the loss of a master who had on the whole been far from hard to them; and yet the predominant feeling was merely surprise, and a general dismay lest the passing of the lands to a new

heir should involve a tax, or extra days of labour in its stead. There was a marked difference between the feeling of the tenants and serfs, and that of the men-at-arms and immediate retainers. The Graf rode last, and let a little space gradually intervene between him and the rest of the train. Then he beckoned Kunz, and asked in a tone, low, but so ominously menacing that it startled the man into full attention, 'What means this, knave? Wouldst play me false?'

'No—no, my good lord,' he returned, imploringly, 'not so, by all the saints;' and then, after a hasty glance round, he added, 'I was making my way back to the Donerwald to find my horse when a stone gave way, and I fell and lamed myself.'

'What fiend brought thee back to the valley?'

'I heard Berthel the huntsman and Gottfried breaking through the thicket by a short way, my lord, and knew they must see me, so I made as if I were from the same direction, and had but outstripped them, and they were too greatly in haste to tarry or note aught about my horse being gone.'

'Fool, didst not remember that thy dripping clothes might have betrayed thee to every eye had any had leisure to mark thee? And why stand all amazed and distraught? Hast never seen a dead man before?'

'Aye, many, my lord; but there was more than a dead man,' said Kunz, his teeth chattering and his swarthy face paler than before. 'How could a dead man reach the bank?'

'What sayst thou, sirrah!' exclaimed the Graf.

'My lord, he fell in mid stream, and was dead even before I reached him, I swear it; but he had called on St. Eustace ere he fell, and either the saint or the foul fiend bore him to the bank.'

'Thou art wont to be keen and clear of wit,' said the Graf, after a pause. 'Yet there must have been some one in the valley.'

'No one, sir, for I could see from end to end from where I stood and watched the Freiherr. St. Sebald! how he came down the rocks! I thought he would

meet his end before ever he reached the stream—and I looked back once more as I climbed the crest; no soul was there.'

Graf Lichtenberg rode on in dark and troubled thought. At last he spoke: 'If any there were we shall learn it, and that soon. Now get thee hence, and bear the tidings to my son; but, mark me, thou hast bungled this matter, and thou knowst I do not lightly pardon him who serves me ill. Enough; buy thy pardon by thy discretion henceforward.'

Whatever Kunz's superstitious terrors, and they were almost beyond his control, his fear of his master's displeasure was even greater. 'I will, my lord, I will,' he stammered, fearfully seeking a relenting glance from those pitiless eyes.

''Tis well. Begone!'

'The horse, my lord: it were not well any found him tied.'

'True; thy wits are coming back. Turn him loose ere any find him.'

Kunz obeyed in haste, though he shuddered at having to pass that dead and ghastly body, carried on the levelled spears—all that was left of the burly, stout-hearted baron who had ridden out in the dawn with such gallant cheer. Although he saw his master scorned the thing, Kunz was profoundly convinced that either saint or devil had marked his deed, since the murdered man had invoked his patron saint, St. Eustace, just as he fell, and was, therefore, under his protection, and no doubt his death would be avenged. The retainers who saw him ride forward guessed rightly that he was bound to Schloss Geyer to tell the young Graf Wolfgang what had befallen, and his departure awakened neither surprise nor comment. He fulfilled all his errand punctually and unobserved, and Wolfgang obeyed his father's directions to join him at Schloss Burgstein that evening; but Kunz did not accompany him, and early the next day he sought the village church and found Pfarrer Basil, just returned from a night of vigil and prayer at the castle, whither he counted shortly to return for the

burial of its lord. He was delayed by this unexpected penitent. Many a long year had passed since Kunz had heard mass or knelt at a confessional, but he did not trouble himself about the long roll of past sins, about which he felt small concern or apprehension; it was the vengeance of St. Eustace which he desired to be protected against.

When he left the church after his shrift he looked and felt just as usual. He had confessed, and necessarily absolution had followed. The penance enjoined he could avoid by paying some broad pieces, for indulgences were to be had by the score from licensed dealers in them, and every crime commuted at a fixed rate of payment. Kunz had his account well settled, and discharged it from his mind. Nothing which the horror-stricken priest could urge had touched him; he had done his share; he was ready to pay his money, and heaven was bound to cancel the debt. He could snap his fingers at St. Eustace's displeasure now, and he went cheerfully up to the castle to seek his lord.

Scarcely had the troop of huntsmen and peasants left the valley when Hildemund came impetuously out of his hiding-place, and stood before the cave of the leper.

'I see it all,' he cried. 'Dolt that I was not to know it at once; this was why the Graf and that squire of his, less base than his lord, conferred together in the Donerwald, and that traitor left his horse tied and hastened away. Oh, villains! they were plotting the death of the Freiherr, because yesterday——'

He broke into a hurried account of what had taken place between the kinsmen, and the vain attempts of the Graf to have speech of his cousin at intervals through the day.

'Aye, clear as yonder stream,' said Ulfric, bending his head. 'Then they saw you not when they conferred in the Donerwald.'

'None saw me, not even the Freiherr. I had noted Griffin and Gunther, his two best hounds, climb the rock overhead, unmarked by Gottfried or any of the rest, because just then the pack made away eastward,

and I guessed that the Freiherr was minded to slay the great boar alone, so I clomb a tree to be out of the beast's course, and mark what line he took, knowing what rare sport there would be. Alas! the prey was statelier than I looked for,' said the boy, his eyes filling with tears. 'And now, how to bring this foul deed home to them who wrought it?'

'Hearken, Hildemund. Your word will avail nought against a lord's, and mine counts not—now,' said the leper, with sudden bitterness; 'you can do nought openly.'

'I will fling this felon deed in his face!'

'Tush, boy; to what avail? Think of your mother. He can crush you both as he would a fly. Who but a few men-at-arms would hearken or believe you?'

'Then shall he do this thing and no vengeance overtake him?'

'I say not so; time brings many chances and changes to all but the dead,' said the leper, with the same touch of hard bitterness as before; 'but for aught you can now do, aye! If you will hear my counsel get you to the castle, and enter unmarked in the tumult there will surely be, and secretly tell all your tale to Walther the seneschal.'

'Yes, yes, you ever fall on the right counsel,' cried Hildemund, who had curbed his impatience with a deference which showed a strange and unusual relationship between this outcast and himself. 'I will do just what you say.'

'Speed then, but be wary, for much may hang on what you do. This Graf's arm is long, and he crushes what he grasps.'

Had Hildemund been less moved and absorbed in the matter in hand he would have again been struck with the manner in which the leper spoke, as if all concerning Graf von Lichtenberg were familiar to him. but he could only think how to pour his tale most speedily and safely into Walther's ear. Ulfric watched him speeding down the valley, and stood long after he was out of sight before he withdrew to his retreat.

As the leper had foreseen, Hildemund entered unmarked in the confusion and stir pervading the castle; but it was long before he could approach the seneschal, who was distraught at the sudden death of the lord whom he had truly loved, filled with apprehensions for the consequences of his death, and wanted in a hundred directions at once. When at last Hildemund could pluck his sleeve and try to attract his attention, he answered, roughly: 'What now, lad? I have no time for thy matters on such a day as this. Get thee home; the Junker is to be here anon, and my good lord is not among us now to shield thee. Out of my way.'

Hildemund could only obey and move aside; but he did not go home. It was unwelcome news that Wolfgang was expected; there was danger in staying, and it was altogether repugnant to him to lurk and hide from his eyes, yet he could not leave the castle without telling his tale, the more that it might be impossible to see Walther at a later time, for the days when Hildemund came and went at will were plainly over. The Graf had, in a calm, matter-of-course way, assumed the command of all things, and the old seneschal found himself, with a heavy and sore heart, merely carrying out his directions.

Presently Hildemund saw Pfarrer Basil, who had been duly summoned, enter the courtyard, sad and grave, crossing the threshold of the castle for the first time to pray by its dead lord. He entered the chapel and knelt near the corpse laid in the choir, whose stones would soon close over the last Lord of Burgstein. Torches were burning round the bier, and the Freifrau wept near—a pale, shadowy, sickly figure; while the little Rosilde, worn out by her first passion of childish grief and terror, lay fast asleep with her head against her mother's knee. Hildemund slipped quietly into a dark corner, and prayed too. 'Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine!' the priest was saying, and Hildemund's tears flowed as he whispered the words after him. Sometimes one, sometimes another, of the household came in and silently

joined in the prayers for the dead. Day was fading, and as the chapel darkened the torchlight grew brighter, revealing the bare, unadorned walls of the building, which was cold and stern as a prison, and wavered on the stones of the pavement, and the pallid, disfigured face of the corpse, strangely livid in its shining, flickering light. The clanking of spurs was heard, and drowned the low murmured prayers of the priest. Graf Lichtenberg entered, followed by Wolfgang, who looked awed and uneasy, and crossed himself with unwonted devotion at the sight of the dead man against whom he had so lately been raging. He felt as if his maledictions had had something to do with his sudden end, and a touch of fear and awe visited him.

'All has been done as you desired, noble sir,' said the old seneschal, in a low, unsteady voice, as he, too, stood looking with a great heartache at his dead master, by whom the little child—now the only representative of her family, the only heir of its lands and wealth—lay sleeping almost as soundly as her father, only that tokens of a violent death were imprinted on the ghastly countenance of the man, and sweet, rosy life on that of the child. The pale widow raised eyes of mingled fear and entreaty to the Graf, as if conscious that she was in his hands. He dipped his hand in the vessel for holy water, and sprinkled a few drops on the dead body of his cousin, and then moved aside to let his son do the same. Walther, too, stooped over his lord, but before he could fulfil the pious office he started back in affright. He thought that a few drops of blood were trickling down the livid brow. Fancy, or the uncertain light, might have deluded him, he could not tell: but it was with a shock of horror that he recalled the universal belief that a murdered man would even in death thus denounce his slayer. He looked from the florid, heavy countenance of Wolfgang, with its dull look of uneasy awe, to the pale, set face of the Graf, who had uttered, or seemed to utter, a brief prayer; and now, after standing for a few moments erect and still, bowed to the widow and left the chapel, eagerly followed by his son. A flash seemed to pass

through Walther's mind; he forgot to pray, and stood trying to put his thoughts into some order, and distinguish between what was true and what were rumours, and readily accepted fancies in the reports brought home of the finding of the dead man. It was with a fresh start that he felt his arm touched, and heard Hildemund whisper: 'I pray you let me speak to you secretly. It touches *him*.'

Walther was in a mood to expect strange revelations, and the boy's appeal no longer found him deaf. He signed to him to follow through a door leading to the private rooms of his lady, empty now, and sat down on a bench, for, stout-hearted as he was, his limbs trembled under him. 'Speak, lad!' he said, hoarsely; 'what of my lord's death?'

'You guess it? You have marked the wound in his right temple? No boar-tusk pierced it.'

'Meinhold told me he had fallen on a sharp stone when struck for death,' answered Walther, gazing at him.

'He fell on no stone that I wot of. He dropped in mid-stream when a felon spear flung by a traitor at a worse traitor's bidding struck him as he faced the boar at bay.'

'Wert thou there?' demanded Walther, now fully roused and on the alert.

'I came too late. I could but drag him to the bank, reaching him from a rock in the stream. But I saw the two, master and man, hold counsel in the Donerwald, and the one rode after the pack, and the other made his way to the Eschthal, and lurked there.'

'Who, then, beheld——?'

'Ulfric the leper, who dwells in a cave among the rocks. He bade me tell you all, and speedily.'

'Oh, my good lord, so foully done to death! It was a true token,' groaned the old seneschal. 'And what to do?'

Mastering his emotion he questioned Hildemund closely as to every detail, trying to reconcile his story with the distorted account given by the huntsmen and

men-at-arms, each of whom had his own tale to tell in the stir and emotion of the return. 'This Ulfric. Who is he?' he asked.

'I know not,' said Hildemund, perplexed how to convey his own confidence in one of that degraded and loathed band of outcasts; 'but he is surely of gentle blood, and wise and kind, and unlike his fellows.'

'How dost know so much of a leper?' asked Walther, in a tone of amazed disgust.

'At first by chance, and since because he has a strange spell which draws one to reverence and pity him. Surely he has some most sad history.'

'A leper, and a boy! That we should have no other witnesses against a noble, and he the favourite of the Markgraf of Brandenburg!'

'It is a monstrous thing that because a felon-traitor is of noble birth his word should be worth more than that of an honest man low born!' exclaimed Hildemund.

'Boy! what folly is this? Wouldst turn the world upside down, and count a serf's word equal to a knight's, perchance?' exclaimed Walther, scandalised amid all his grief and perplexity. 'Yet for once I could almost wish it were so,' he added reluctantly.

'And the little Burgfräulein?' suggested Hildemund.

'Alas! my little lady! the last rose of Burgstein!' said the old retainer, in bitterness of spirit; 'and the mother so weak and of such a feeble spirit, and so aghast with these ill-tidings, that I fear the Graf will easily bend her to his will.'

'Oh, sir, not if she knew the truth,' Hildemund cried. 'Do you mean that the Graf will seek to renew the betrothal? Give the child of the man murdered by his command to his son! It were too foul!'

'Seek it he will, doubtless, but that shall not be, though I have to slay him and his son to stay it. That I should have to live under one roof with them, and make no sign! I know not how I shall endure it. Yet

must I wait and see how matters shape. I would there were any to take counsel with.'

'Pfarrer Basil?' suggested Hildemund.

'I know nought of him. He has a golden tongue, they say, but it is not that we need. No, I may trust no stranger with so weighty a matter. But hearken, lad,' he added, with a sudden recollection; 'one thing I will look to. Thou wert near enough yesterday to hear what my lord said touching the banished Duke? Art man enough to take him a warning, and save the prince while baffling the Graf?'

'That am I!' cried Hildemund, joyfully.

'Then hearken. It seems the Duke has an enterprise on foot by which he thinks to win back his town of Stuttgardt, and he must pass through the Hohlweg, five leagues hence, by noon to-morrow, from the convent where he will lie to-night. Canst thou reach the Hohlweg by dawn, ere the League set their ambush?'

'I can but try.'

'Would I could give thee a horse, for the way is long, and thou hast been afoot since the morning, but I dare not. Thou must eat ere going forth, and go under cover of night, lest any mark it and suspicion arise.'

'I would my mother knew I was safe,' said Hildemund, a little anxiously.

''Tis pity she should be disquieted, but she would be the first to say she would suffer much to save a hunted man,' said Walther, who knew Frau Magdalene well.

'But were it not well I had some pretext for my journey? What if I meet Kunz, and were stayed if I can give no reason for being there afoot? Should I not do well to go home and fetch my pack of books and bear them to the Annenkloster, for it must be there the Duke lies? The brethren there often buy of me.'

'Well thought of, lad! Thou hast keen wits and canst use them, but I grudge the time. Now I will fetch food for thee; it is well that no prying eye will come hither, for I would not that any tongue wagged as to this conference. Ah, my dear lord, this at least shall be done to pleasure thee and baffle the man whose

treachery compassed thy death. May the fiend give me the chance to repay that deed, and shame the master and meet his tool in fair fight, and may he keep out of my way till then!' muttered the old seneschal, his heart hot within him at the thought of living under one roof with his lord's assassins. He fetched food and drink, and bade Hildemund make the best meal he could, and fill his pack with provisions for his journey, and then left him to wait until it should be dark enough to pass the gates unobserved, except by the trusty men whom he meant to post there. He hurried back to his duties, fearing lest his absence should have been already noticed, but no one seemed to have observed it, and he was glad not to see Kunz anywhere. Kunz, in fact, had resolved not to venture into the castle until he had made himself safe by confession, and for that he had to wait until Pfarrer Basil returned for mass in the early morning, after his night of prayer beside the dead Freiherr. Walther was spared the necessity of meeting him that evening, but he could not avoid meeting Kunz's master, nor the bitterness of having to receive orders from him. There was some change in his demeanour, in spite of his best efforts, which betrayed itself immediately to the keen perceptions of the Graf. 'The man has heard something!' was his thought, and the next, 'But from whom!' He kept him for some time while he gave directions, and asked one question and another arising out of the circumstances, ending with an inquiry as to who kept the gate that night.

'Meinhold and Ottheinrich, noble sir.'

'Good. They are among the trustiest of the men-at-arms, doubtless. But stay, I bethink me—no word of what has befallen has been sent to Hohenfels? I know not how it has been overlooked; and the baron will take it ill if he be not summoned to the funeral to-morrow. Let Meinhold go thither, and lose no time.'

'Meinhold, my lord?'

'Yes; he rides fast and well, and will be there sooner than any other of the men. My fellow Hans can take his place.'

Nothing could have been more unwelcome, but the seneschal dared make no objection. His face fell, do what he would, and he felt that the Graf saw it. He withdrew in silence, leaving Graf Lichtenberg to renewed disquiet. 'How came a dead man to the bank?' he said to himself, almost as uneasily as Kunz. Perhaps a shade of remorse mingled with his feelings; yet his main impression was that a great difficulty was removed from his way, a great future open before him, if only no one betrayed how it had come about. It was a time of violent deeds. Those very Brandenburgers to whose great and rising fortunes he had attached himself, weary of the prolonged life and lavish extravagance of their old father, had seized him, masked and disguised, and imprisoned him as a madman in the strong castle of Klassenburg. Other deeds, wilder and wickeder still, were told of many a man who bore an ancient name, and stood high at the Imperial Court, or in the favour of archbishop or prince. Had this hot-headed Baron of Burgstein lived it had been fatal to the fortunes, perhaps cost the head, of von Lichtenberg. And yet he could not silence his disquietude. The risk was great; he was hardly important enough, of rank high enough, to pass on unharmed were the deed bruited abroad. Of Kunz's silence he was absolutely secure, but what if another had knowledge of what had befallen in the Eschthal? He could not hope to be backed by Markgraf Kasimir, a man not unlike himself, though far more sagacious and crafty. The Markgraf did not love a dependent who got into trouble, and Lichtenberg was not indispensable to him, though on the way to become so. The old Roman custom that every great man should have his train of clients had reappeared in Germany throughout the Middle Ages. Not only every great noble, but every rich merchant, had his clients, and the fast rising house of Brandenburg had a goodly following. Ruprecht of Lichtenberg was one of these. He had done the Markgraf good service; he hoped to do more yet. The moment was favourable, and he had run a great risk to seize it. This much at least was

gained, that the helpless timid widow of his cousin had made no opposition to anything he had proposed, and yielded passively to his authority. He had no fear but that he should be able to send an ample remittance to Kasimir of Brandenburg, though he could not lend him the following of men whom he had hoped to take to the capture of the Duke of Würtemberg. The burial was on the morrow, and all the men-at-arms and followers of Burgstein must be present, much more the nearest male relation. The Graf betook himself to his chamber, and wrote a letter for Kunz to carry the next day to the Markgraf, explaining his absence and promising a subsidy which should amply atone for it.

It was night before Walther returned to Hildemund, who had found the time very long. He could hear by sounds in an adjoining chamber that the Freifrau had been persuaded to leave the chapel, and that Barbara was attending on her and the little Rosilde, but no one entered the small room where the seneschal had taken him. The moon came out and flooded the castle court with light, but only a few of its rays could penetrate through the narrow window and glitter on the oak floor, making the polished surface like a shining pool, and the figures on the Flemish tapestry over the doorway weird and magnified. The stir and hum about the castle grew less and less, though figures still came and went, to and from the kitchen or stables, or the chapel, where preparations were being made for the morrow's funeral. Other sounds, unnoticed by day, grew audible; Hildemund noted each as the long minutes passed by. He could hear the horses in the stables stamping and moving restlessly; the dull splash as a bucket, lowered into the deep well, struck the water; the bark of a dog, the clank of its chain as it pulled against it in its kennel; footsteps crossing the yard and pausing; some interchanges of words; the creaking of the drawbridge as it was raised for the night; the last clink and clang from the forge, where not only was armour repaired and altered, but all vessels of iron, all chains and bolts which needed repair, from a cauldron to the lock of a strong

box, were carried; but these now ceased. The day's work was over. Next he heard the shrill squeak of the larger bats, sweeping backwards and forwards in chase of moths; the owls hooted, and one flitted soundlessly by the window, so close that he could see the soft white wings and great eyes. Still Walther came not, though priceless time was passing. At last he stood in the doorway, an unlighted lamp in his hand.

'Lad,' he said, in a low voice, for only the tapestry divided the anteroom from the Freifrau's chamber, 'this Graf surely hath a familiar spirit which whispers secrets in his ear, like that Count of Foix whom old chronicles tell of. Why else should he bethink himself to post one of his own men at the gate to-night, so that none can go out or in but he can hear thereof?'

'Has he so?' said Hildemund, startled; 'he has guessed somewhat, it would seem. Then there is no leaving the castle by the gate.'

'How else wouldst thou leave it?' asked the seneschal, with a sharp, inquiring look at the boy, who looked down and coloured.

'Be not displeased, Master Walther; it may serve us in good stead at this pinch, though I should not dare to tell you of such a prank otherwise, but once I did leave the castle by the little old postern. There is a plank gone, and I clambered round to where the rock is something less steep, and reached the old gnarled oak which grows out of the cliff, and so down.'

'If my lord knew of this prank,' began Walther, indignantly, but stopped short with a pang of recollection. 'Alas, what am I saying? So thou didst climb down the cliff, malapert? By St. Eustace'—Walther had caught his lord's favourite oath, and swore on all solemn occasions by the patron saint of hunting and of Burgstein—'it was a brave deed, though a foolhardy. True it is that once there was a narrow ledge all around the walls, whereby they might be visited if need were, though I knew not that a goat could climb down thence, but it is long since anyone adventured along that dizzy path, and the old postern may well have

gone to decay. It must be looked to. I may not let thee risk thy life thus to-night; the moonlight is deceitful, and a slip full easy. No; I must intrust thee with a secret known but to my lord and me, for only the lord of the castle and his seneschal hold this knowledge in each generation.'

Walther went to the window and looked out. The surrounding walls stood high and dark, and shadows lurked in the corners, but the keep rose up high into the night sky, where floated a few white clouds, reflecting the moonbeams which flooded its eyeless face with ivory light. A fainter, earthlier yellow ray came from the chapel windows, and messengers came and went from its door across the court to fetch the black cloth with which it was to be hung, or make other preparations for the morrow.

'Stephan is there, and Hansjörg; they would stay thee. It were safer to go through the hall. I will go first. The men have had much to do, and cannot yet get to their beds, so I have ordered them an extra meal. I warrant they will not heed thee. Take this platter and cup as though to wait on them. Go boldly through, and by the little passage leading to the stair in the wall which takes y u to the lower hall of the donjon. Dost understand?'

Hildemund obeyed with the ready apprehension which never deserted him. Walther preceded him into the hall, where a party of retainers were supping and talking over the morning's calamity and its probable results, but all had evidently accepted the belief that the Freiherr had been struck with apoplexy. They spoke in voices less loud than usual, and song and jest were absent, for all felt that there would now be a rule in the castle very unlike that of their jovial, good-humoured, hot-headed master.

'All the pitchers empty, men?' said Walther, stopping by the end of the table where they were gathered.

'Here, Friedel, bestir thyself and fetch another stoup.'

'I go, sir, I go,' answered Hildemund, and disappeared with great alacrity just as the Graf entered from the upper end of the hall, and asked if Kunz had come yet.

All the voices had dropped at once into silence at the first sound of his voice.

'He told Jacob Schreihuhn, who came with Junker Wolfgang, that he would be here early to-morrow, noble sir,' answered one of the men.

'So! Let me know as soon as he comes; I have an errand for him; and see that a swift horse be ready.' The Graf had caught a glimpse of Hildemund, and although the light was dim and uncertain he felt a vague suspicion that some one not of the household had been in the hall. 'Who was yonder boy who went out but now?'

The men who had paid no attention to the boy whom Walther had addressed, looked perplexed.

'Do you mean Heinrich, the cook's boy, noble sir, or Jörg, or Friedel? They were all here just now.'

'My lord means Friedel; the seneschal sent him for another wine stoup,' said another.

'The knave tarries long. I will send Jörg, if I see him. You have no commands for me, my lord?' said Walther.

The Graf shook his head, and Walther retired. A lad presently appeared with wine, and no suspicion was aroused among the men. The Graf looked at him keenly, but he was something of the same height and colouring as Hildemund, and his suspicions were allayed. He felt much security in the certainty that no one would leave the castle unmarked by his spy, who perfectly understood why he was to share Heinrich's watch instead of Meinhold, though he did not trouble himself as to his master's reasons. The dependents of Graf Lichtenberg were too well disciplined to inquire into their lord's motives for anything he chose to do. They knew it was an offence which he never overlooked, and they knew, too, that he could reward amply and punish terribly.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH all the speed he could make Hildemund found his way to the large square hall of the keep, a huge, dreary place never used or inhabited. Walther soon joined him and sought by the moonlight for a part of the wall where, under the pressure of his hand, a stone turned revealing a narrow opening. A cold wind blew through it; all was pitch darkness within. Walther struck fire with a flint and steel which he had brought and kindled the lamp, which he gave to Hildemund; the little pale flame flickered in the draughty air, and seemed as if it could hardly contend with the thick darkness pressing upon it.

'Your word that you will never betray nor use this secret save in the service of our little lady and mistress,' he said. 'I never thought to tell it to living soul, but what can one do? I must not tarry; but heed what I have to say. You will have to go down many steps and then along a passage; presently you will hear water, and be wary then how you walk, for there is but a narrow way above the stream, and the passage thenceforward has been more hollowed by the water than made by man. Some cunning builder used it to serve his turn. It is the Pöllatwasser which flows down there, and if you follow it you will come to the opening where it pours out and leaps into the valley below.'

'Why, I have been a dozen times among the rocks where the water-leap is, and never guessed anyone could enter the cavern!' exclaimed the boy, in astonished vexation. Walther smiled grimly.

'There be yet some secrets about the castle you have not found out, young master,' he said, 'but seek not to return this way, for you could not open the door. Make all the speed you may, and God be with you, my boy. I would I had any token to send the Duke, but he should know an honest face when he sees it, if 'tis only for its rarity!'

'But how shall I tell you how I sped?'

'For that you must wait until I can go to your house. Farewell, dear lad.'

He drew back, and the stone closed behind him. Hildemund could not even hear his footsteps. Guarding the flame of his lamp he went down the steps further and further into the darkness. The light shone for a moment on either side of the narrow way as he passed along, glittering on the damp and shining walls of rock. Not a sound broke the intense silence, except the occasional fall of heavy drops of water from the rocky roof and his own footsteps; the air became thick and heavy, and the darkness was so dense that it seemed a solid thing around him; he felt as if he were going down into the very heart of the earth. He could not calculate time or distance in this blank, black solitude. All at once a sound seemed to fill his ears and startle him inexpressibly; then he knew it was the hurried beating of his own heart, and that he was afraid. He had been on far more perilous adventures before now, when a false step or a moment's heedlessness had been death, and here, as far as he knew, was absolutely no danger at all; but then he had been in the free open air, with the sky above him, and familiar sights and sounds all about, and he had felt only exhilarated by the sense of danger. Here he seemed cut off from all the living, with nothing between him and the spirit world, and his heart failed him. He stood still and rallied his spirits, crossed himself, and repeated a short, fervent prayer that he might not disgrace himself by being a coward, and went on again. The way was always downward, and no sign of any end. His lamp began to flicker and send up uncertain vivid flashes;. it would not burn much longer. What if it went out and left him in this total darkness, this utter silence? But the silence was no longer so unbroken. He began to distinguish the ripple and flow of water, and his heart leapt as if he were already out of his prison. This must be the brook called the Pöllatwasser, which flowing from the high land behind the Burgstein made its way

underground for a considerable distance and emerged by this passage to fall in a silver cascade of much more height than volume, and join the river in the valley below. Although, seen from the village, both the Rossberg and the Burgstein looked like isolated rocks, the latter formed part of the rocky ground lying behind it, at a lower level indeed, so that the cliff on which the castle stood rose solitary and inaccessible on all sides. There were many springs and streams in this district, which found their way on either side of the watershed, and the Pöllatwasser was one. It was well that Hildemund's lamp burned for some minutes longer, even though with intermittent and ominous flashes, for he could see the narrow ledge above the water now flowing beside him, and when the light suddenly went out and he had to make his way by feeling the rocky wall with its vault hardly above his head, he was no longer oppressed by the soundless solitude, for the stream was an old friend, and its voice called him to follow to the fair world of light and air whither it was going. Presently a faint glimmer of daylight lessened the darkness and gradually turned it into duskiness, though until close to the opening among the broken tumbled rocks and brushwood half-way down the Burgstein no clear light was visible. How to emerge, however, Hildemund could not guess. The mouth of the cave was entirely occupied by the stream, which leaped down, a true 'wild wasser,' and shattered itself into spray and foam as it fell. But presently he discovered three or four steps leading up to a hole in the rock overhead, by which he emerged, and found himself close to the path leading down to the village, with the castle far overhead and the valley yet far below, and the moonlight silvering the stream flowing through it and massing the woods into blackness. Hildemund's heart exulted in the sense of peril past and the return to the upper world as he looked around, and forgot the sense of weariness which had grown very oppressive as he made his way through the subterranean passage. He felt as if he had somehow conquered all this lovely, moonlit world to

which he had come back again. But there was no time to linger; he could not tell how much had been spent in his slow progress, and all his journey was yet before him. Before he could start on his mission he must descend the long path to the valley, and thence make his way to his home. And by the time he had done this he was dismayed to feel how hard it was to drag his limbs along. He had been on foot more or less since the dawn, and the day had been one of keen and varied emotions. 'How shall I ever reach Sanct Anna by morning?' was his thought as he opened the house door. His mother sat reading; she looked pale and anxious, as he saw immediately. 'Do not blame me, mother dear! there was no help for this delay,' he said, grieved and eager.

'I wait to blame until I know there is cause, my son,' she answered, with her gentle gravity. 'What has befallen?'

No rumour had reached the lonely dwelling of the day's doings. More than one peasant woman or child had come to consult Frau Magdalene about some case of sickness, but they had heard nothing concerning Burgstein. Hildemund was the first to tell the tale, which he did, without holding anything back. Frau Magdalene was mute with horror.

'The little child!' she said, at last. 'In such godless hands!'

She said no more. Emotion did not readily pass with her into speech, but Hildemund knew how profoundly moved she was. Amid her horror and pity, too, there was a great thrill of fear for her boy, but she gave it no words, and when he roused himself to prepare his pack of books she began to help him, only saying tenderly, 'My tired lad! I would thou couldst rather go to thy bed!'

'So do I, mother dear,' said Hildemund, ruefully, but bracing himself manfully to get ready for his journey. 'If only I get speech of the Duke! What if they will not let me come nigh him?'

'Hast thou nothing choice among thy books to

show him? Thou must even use thy best wits when the time comes; but if it may be, betray to none that thou hast a secret message for him. Who knows what traitors there may be amongst his followers, or even among the brethren of the cloister?'

'True, mother, I had not thought about that. Be not troubled about me; the thing has to be done, and I'm glad it falls to me.'

He smiled the sweet, brave smile which he had inherited from his father, and which had won the young heart of Magdalene for Kilian Dahn. The boy was a true Thuringian, sharing both in the Southern and Northern German nature, with the joyous delight in life characterising the South, and all its freshness and simplicity, yet dashed with the sober reserve and sturdiness of the North. Although he hourly recalled his father to Magdalene, who loved him doubly for being thus as it were both himself and Kilian, yet he had an equally strong resemblance to her. 'A delightful boy,' Pfarrer Basil had inwardly called him; and truly all his life he had been the delight of his mother's heart.

'How weary he is,' she said to herself, as she looked after him. 'I scarce know his step, and the Annenkloster so far, and dangers many. God guide and keep my boy, and save the poor Duke. The dear Lord knows 'tis the only son of his mother, and she a widow.' And she lifted a wistful appealing look to the night sky, and went indoors again, and prayed not only for her son, but for those who had done the dark deed in the Eschthal, and those who would suffer from it.

Hildemund stepped out with sturdy resolution by narrow tracks made by woodcutters, or charcoal burners, or foresters. He had a short boar-spear in his hand, for wolves would be abroad at that time, and the forest was unsafe. The wind bent the tree tops, and rustled the branches, or came up with a great surge over the pines. Owls hooted to one another; a rustle in the furze sometimes told that a wild animal was moving there. Once the eyes of a wild cat like great

yellow topazes looked down on Hildemund from a branch over his head, along which the creature lay flat, waving its tufted tail over him, but he had been out before now at night in the woods and knew its ways. An hour later he passed a hut for the first time; it was Kaspar's, and he saw him standing at the door, with a horse tied near.

'So! Good morrow, or good night, Kaspar!' he cried. 'What horse have you there?'

'One that strayed by just now. I caught it, and now I watch it lest the wolves should make a meal of it.'

Hildemund looked eagerly at it.

'Hark you, Kaspar, this beast belongs to Lichtenberg. You might get a broad piece by taking it home —and yet no, I know not—it were safer mayhap to have nought to do with it.'

'I take not a stiver from that hand,' said Kaspar, fiercely. 'This von Lichtenberg has ever been the cruellest master to his serfs; he was knee deep in the blood of the peasants when poor Conrad and the rest were slaughtered in Würtemberg twelve years ago. Lutheran or Papist is all one to him, but let a man bethink him that he is a man, rack, and cord, and gibbet, and red-hot tongs are his portion. And now he hopes to be master here!'

'It is no time to talk of such matters,' said Hildemund. 'What then will you do with the beast? Listen,' and a smile of mischievous amusement flashed over his countenance; 'lend it to me to ride to Sanct Anna; I am bound to be there early, and I am heartily tired.'

'Take it,' answered Kaspar, briefly.

'I would you would let me give you somewhat for the loan,' said Hildemund, who knew well how dire were the straits to which the wretched household were often reduced.

'Do, an thou wilt; I will gladly take it from thee,' said Kaspar, with sudden eagerness. 'I need money sorely.'

'Is aught amiss?—Your father?' asked Hildemund,

struck with something unusual about the man's face and voice.

'He needs nought. I found him dead when I came home but now.'

'Alone! without a priest?'

'Aye, even so.'

'The poor old man!'

'Pity him if you will for having lived, not for having died. Methinks his soul needs no masses; he has had his share of Purgatory,' said Kaspar, abruptly, and withdrew into his hut. Hildemund thought he understood now his eagerness for the money. He would need it to pay the dead-tax ere the old man could be buried. 'Poor old man!' he repeated to himself as he rode off. It would be necessary to take a longer way, for, where a boy might go, a horse could not, but that mattered little; he should easily reach the Hohlweg before the ambush was laid, and Sanct Anna before the Duke was astir. Even if the League had already seized the pass, there would be small risk of a solitary traveller being stopped, he hoped, both for the Duke's sake and his own, for he by no means desired that his pack should be overhauled, since under less dangerous wares were several of Luther's last broadsheets and pamphlets for the prior of Sanct Anna. The abbot troubled himself little about controversy, but the prior and several of the brethren were strongly on the side of reform.

To ride Graf von Lichtenberg's horse in order to baffle his schemes filled Hildemund's heart with delight. He laughed for pure enjoyment. Night was nearly gone. There was a stir in the leaves as if the trees were awakening; the sky grew pale in the east, and the dusky earth and pale horizon seemed to blend together. A blackbird awoke, and sang for a moment, taking up his song just where he had left it the evening before, when, perched aloft, he had trilled with all his might, as if he had to tell a tale which must be finished before nightfall. As he had been the last songster to make his notes heard, so now he was the first to uplift them; but he ceased almost directly. A roe deer trotted by,

brushing the heavy dew off the ferns, and carrying a bit of honeysuckle in its mouth which it had nipped at the edge of the glade. The wood pigeons awoke and cooed, and the blackbird broke again into louder and more continued song. Dawn grew rosy in the east, while in the western sky the moon had almost gone down. Then a saffron glow spread far up the sky, precursor of the sun himself, and the world seemed all at once to awake and fill with life and sound.

By this time Hildemund could see from the high ground the cloister of Sanct Anna in a broad valley below, and the more distant houses of Schwanstadt, a town where he had often been. Blue mists lay thick in the vale, and the ground was all wet with night dew. The first glow of full daylight was appearing as Hildemund rode into the narrow ravine known as the Hollow Way. He could not but think what a well chosen place for an ambush it was, for while a small body of men could easily bar either end, a large one could command it overhead, concealed from view and in perfect safety among the rocks and brushwood.

'What traitors the Duke must have about him to tell the very day and hour of his passing here, and to plan so surely for his destruction!' Hildemund was thinking, as he glanced around. Just then a stone fell from above, dislodged perhaps by its own weight, but his heart gave a leap, and he urged his horse on, almost sure that he caught the gleam of a steel cap among the bushes overhead. If it were so, those lying in wait thought it best to let him pass, and he found himself in the broad, green valley unmolested. To ride up to the monastery and excite wonder and comment by such an unusual mode of arrival was not to be thought of, and a mile from the gates he turned his horse loose by a clear wimpling stream, which was on its way to join the Neckar, and walked on, too full of hope and expectation to feel weary.

The cloister of Sanct Anna was a veritable fortress, though built for men of peace; no one at that time felt safe beyond walls and moats; but the scene around was

one of plenty and prosperity. Vineyards, whose sunny wine filled the abbot's cellars, covered a gentle slope near the convent; cattle dotted the broad meadows; corn, gathered ready for the barn, stood golden in the fields, or had been already carried into the granges, and labourers were hastening to their work of storing it away, or were milking the cows, or ploughing with the heavy primitive implement which took two men to guide it and a stout ox to drag it through the deep furrows of the rich soil. There was not wanting, however, a dark shadow on the fair scene: the gallows stood near the monastery, with its clanking chains and more than one dead body. Death was inflicted for many crimes besides murder, and executioners had their hands full in those days. The abbey prison was rarely empty; there were prisoners under accusation, and prisoners condemned, and debtors to the abbot constantly occupying it. Such an establishment as this was a little kingdom, ruling its possessions and its dependents at its will, with ample revenues and rights over fish and game, tax and toll, while its own lands provided flax and corn, fruits, wine, and food in abundance. If the abbot were an ambitious man, his hand would be felt in political matters far beyond his immediate neighbourhood; he would probably leave his cloister a good deal to the prior, and live at the court of his bishop, who would be a great secular prince as well as a spiritual potentate, and fill some second office there. Such had been Abbot Willibald, the last head of Sanct Anna, and some of the monks found great fault with their actual ruler for his indifference to worldly gain or splendour, and the sums he spent on beautifying his church and increasing the convent library, and importing plants and flowers hitherto unknown in Germany for his private garden. Abbot Willibald, when at Sanct Anna, had filled it with splendid guests, and entertained them royally; but Abbot Johannes would let months pass without inviting anyone to pass the gates except architects from Milan, painters from Cologne or Nüremberg, or messengers bringing him books and roots from

Augsburg and Basel, Leipzig and Hamburg. Latin and German books were growing more and more numerous, though Greek ones were still very rare; and long before Luther's time a flood of broadsheets and works fulminating against the Papacy and clergy, and demanding reform, and separation between Church and State, had abounded, notwithstanding the bull of Leo X. ordering confiscation of all unauthorised works, and a fine of ducats, full weight, with excommunication of seller and buyer; and it was not in convents that these were least read. Hildemund knew he and his pack were secure of a welcome from more than the prior, though certain of the brethren were carefully excluded from all knowledge of the transaction. The new doctrine was stirring Sanct Anna, and waking up strife and dissension there as elsewhere.

The great gateway rose before him, flanked by two strong towers. There was always a body of men-at-arms to garrison the abbey, which, standing alone as it did, had to defend itself and the peasants who fled into it at any time of danger with their household stuff. Civil war, feuds with neighbouring barons or with the town of Schwanstadt, ever jealous of the claims of Sanct Anna, alternately menaced the brotherhood, with but short intervals of tranquillity. The gateway itself sufficiently told the same warlike existence of the brotherhood, for it was loopholed, with an embattled parapet above it, a drawbridge, and two ponderous doors. Between the two centre parapets was a stone figure, with a mitre and a pastoral staff. The building was a long quadrangle, with the church at one end, surrounded by a deep moat and wall, with an unusually high rampart. Hildemund stood for a moment considering. He wished he could divine where the Duke might be. If he had brought many attendants no doubt they were lodged in the hospitium for inferior guests—a building of stone, plaster, and timber, apart from the main edifice, cared for by the cellarer or hospitaller, or some other officer—but Ulrich would certainly be in the abbot's own house, and how to get speech of him? It

could not be hoped that the abbot would condescend to summon Hildemund to his presence while occupied with his princely guest, to whom he would be showing the library, or his private garden, of which he was equally proud; or else he would be in secret consultation over plans to recover the duchy from which the Duke had been expelled five years before by force and fraud combined. The abbot had been deeply indebted to Ulrich's grandfather, the noble Eberhard with the Beard, and now showed his gratitude by befriending the fugitive descendant of his benefactor at some considerable risk, for not only was the formidable union of nobles and free cities, known as the Swabian League, the inveterate foe of Ulrich, and in possession of his duchy, but Austria coveted it, and Brandenburg was ever ready to aid the imperial schemes. It could not be hoped that Ulrich's visit to Sanct Anna could be kept a secret, and if his present schemes failed the abbot who had received him and lent him money would suffer too. Hildemund guessed a little of this, and he saw that the sudden blow which the Duke had hoped to strike was no secret to his enemies, who were ready to turn this project to Ulrich's own destruction. It was urgent to warn him, but he must trust to good fortune to find an opportunity. He went up to the gate. The watchman was standing above it, at the little door of his cell which was over the gateway. He recognised Hildemund and nodded to him, and the porter saw him almost as soon, and gave him a cordial greeting. Hildemund had the fairy gift of winning a smile and a welcome wherever he went.

'You will scarce see my lord abbot,' said the porter; 'he hath for once other things in his mind than books and roots.'

'Why, what is toward?' asked Hildemund, shifting his pack, and hoping to gain some useful intelligence.

'We have guests, lad! Aye, you will scarcely believe it. It minds me of the good old times of our late abbot. Then indeed there was a goodly stir, a coming and going that ended not; it was a pleasure to be porter

then. Now, most times, I might slumber as I were one of the Seven Sleepers, and none would call me to open the gate.'

'And who may be here?'

'The Duke of Würtemberg, no less! A prince, every inch of him, whatever his foes may say. A wild one an you will, but would you have a prince live like a hermit?'

'And what brings him here?'

'Nay, that I know not; I am not in my lord abbot's secrets, and scarce is it safe for him thus to venture into his duchy, all garrisoned by his enemies; but we are all for Würtemberg here, not one of us *bündisch*, unless it be Brother Otto, who has his family in Reutlingen. I would not trust him.'

'Aye, it was the chastisement the Duke gave Reutlingen for slaying his forester that first brought the vengeance of the League on him.'

'Even so; and a sore vengeance it has been. Pass on, my son; there comes the precentor, and he signs to thee.'

Hildemund went onward into the great quadrangle, along which ran the ambulatory, with its penthouse roof supported on numerous columns, with the dormitory above it on one side, faced by the refectory on the other. At the eastern end was the stately church, with the chapter house on the north of it. At one corner was the stair leading to the dormitory, at another that which led to the refectory, a noble hall with its small kitchen behind it. There was a much larger kitchen on the ground floor, and an inner court with other buildings round it, all enclosed within the high and massive walls, below which ran the wide moat.

As the porter had said, the precentor had caught sight of Hildemund, and was beckoning to him. Hildemund went up to him and made his greeting with due reverence.

'Hast brought us another chorale or song as sweet as those last?' asked the precentor; 'the Duke, who is now with us, was mightily pleased with those we had

from thee in the spring. He would fain know who it is who makes these lays, which it seems are sung at market and camp and in court and ladies' bower. What hast thou brought me?'

'I fear me nought that befits this holy place, father. I have nought but a love song,' said Hildemund, with an arch twinkle in his eyes.

'Well, well, we are not so lightly moved as to be endangered by thy song,' said the precentor, good humouredly. 'Let me hear it and judge thereof. Thou hast a pretty, lark-like pipe, though not over strong. Begin, my son.'

And Hildemund put down his pack and obeyed, smiling, but throwing into the simple words a feeling which made them infinitely touching.

Ach! wie herbe ist das Scheiden,
Wenn nun Einer geht von Beiden
Die sich treu geliebt!
Als wir von einander gingen,
Uns zum letztenmal umfingen,
Weinten wir all zwei,
Blickten still uns in die Augen,
Liessen stille Thränen saugen
Von der Wangen Schnee;
Als wir von einander gingen,
Uns zum letztenmal umfingen,
Unterm Eichbaum grün.
Oftmals pflegt' ich dir's zu sagen:
Liebe muss am Leiden klagen,
Kennt kein bleibend Glück.
Wann ich in den Wald werd' gehen,
Und die grünen Wipfel sehen,
Wein' ich mich zu Tod.

ASIATIC SOCIETY

'I know not wherein lies the spell of these silly songs,' said the precentor, who had had to wipe his eyes, which he did quite simply and openly, not at all ashamed that they were wet. 'My lord, pardon me; I knew not that you and his highness were here,' he added, hastily, and in some confusion, as the voice of his superior reached him, and he saw Abbot Johannes with his guest, advancing from the passage leading to the abbot's house.

'A sweet ditty, and sweetly sung,' said the Duke. 'Come hither, boy.'

Hildemund's heart beat high as he advanced and lifted a glance to the man of whom such wild tales were told; who had been a child ruler, an exiled man, the victim of his own violent temper and of powerful and embittered enemies. As the porter had said, although his countenance bore traces of suffering and violent passions, and a deep melancholy sat upon it, Ulrich of Würtemberg was every inch a prince. The contrast between his stately bearing and martial air, and the round, well-nourished face and figure of Abbot Johannes provoked a smile.

'Whence hast thou these songs, my fair boy?' he asked, in a manner irresistibly sweet and gracious. 'It would seem they are all framed by one cunning singer, and go where one will one hears them, now grave, now gay, but ever lovely. The very air is full of them. Who is the happy singer on whom this gift is bestowed of heaven?'

'I may not say, my noble lord.'

'How! what hinders?' asked the Duke, with the sudden darkening of countenance called up at once by any opposition; and Hildemund felt how stormy and formidable his displeasure must be.

'I have passed my word to tell no man his name, good my lord.'

'Pshaw! a prince's desires should override such a promise; or has the command of a banished lord no weight?'

'Ah, double, treble, my dear lord; but yet—'

'Yet what?' asked Ulrich, his face clearing at once at the warm and eager outcry whose sincerity was unmistakable. 'I am none of the richest, as my lord abbot here knows,' he added, with a smile and glance at the abbot, who raised his hands and eyes with a gesture of rueful assent; 'but I will give thee ten gold pieces if thou wilt tell me the name of this unknown Meistersänger.'

'My noble lord, can your highness think I will do

so for gold if I will not to please you ? ' said Hildemund, deeply mortified.

'I have found gold would win most things,' said Ulrich, with a mirthless laugh. 'Gold lost me Würtemberg five years ago, for the League had the longer purse, and my Swiss melted away like their own snow when the Föhn blows, and many a noble followed. So thou wilt not tell me ? '

'Noble sir, the man who makes these lays which all are singing is so unhappy that I think few ever had so cruel a fate. Gentle he is of breeding, yet an outcast for no fault of his, and most friendless except for me and my mother, and I *could* not fail the trust he puts in me, my lord. He is poor enough already.'

'Enough ! I ask thee no more. Poor ! nay, what man is poor that owns a faithful friend ? I call this man rich, boy. Yet truly I should know how to feel for him if his life be what thou sayst.'

He paused in dark and troubled thought, and the abbot, who had been on thorns to put the question, eagerly asked Hildemund if he had brought him aught new or rare. All his anxiety about the upshot of the Duke's visit was forgotten in this momentous inquiry. Hildemund began to open his pack, and the abbot's little grey eyes sparkled greedily. 'What ! what ! ' he exclaimed, stammering with excitement, a new Vergilius from the press of Aldus Manutius ! On parchment, too, and the type so fair and clear as I yet never beheld ! It would seem that though we have lost Master Manuzi himself, his worthy father-in-law continues his labours excellently well, and it is said that his son Paolo hath the same learned and discriminating taste as Aldus himself. But art sure this is no counterfeit from Lyons or Florence ? ' he asked, with a spasm of alarm ; 'let me see the Aldine mark, my son.'

He peered with deep anxiety at the title page and examined it long and minutely. Then his face relaxed ; he heaved a sigh of relief, and looked at the volume tenderly. 'Yes, it is genuine, certainly genuine. See, prior, saw you ever a more beauteous work ? It may yet

be that our library will equal that of Abbot Trithemius, with its two thousand volumes. A learned man and a crafty—Abbot Trithemius. Many a precious manuscript which otherwise had found its way hither hath he secured by gold and subtlety for Spanheim, but Heaven has taken his soul unto itself. May it have peace!' said the abbot, piously crossing himself, and doubtless feeling there was a consoling side to this loss; 'and other people have now a chance of getting rare and valuable books and manuscripts.'

'You have not yet seen this work, my lord,' said Hildemund.

'How! Mary and Joseph! the Annales of Tacitus! Thou art a good boy, a good boy, and shalt find thy profit in serving me. This is a white day, and must be celebrated in the convent. See to it, cellarer.'

'Will it please you to look at these Hours of the Blessed Mary, my lord?'

'Well, we will have it for the library; it is but fit we should,' said the abbot, with much less enthusiasm, 'though I would that Aldus would occupy himself rather with the works of the ancients. My lord, will you allow me to leave you for an instant? I would fain compare these Annales with the copy which I already possess. I am with you again in a moment.'

'Nay, hurry not, my good father,' said Ulrich, a smile crossing his face as he looked at the portly little figure, which told a tale of habitual good living, and a peaceful, sedentary life. 'It is yet full early. I will look through this fair youth's stores while you are thus worthily employed. What have you that an unlettered man may buy, my boy?'

'Your highness is pleased to jest,' said Hildemund, his mind full of the question how to introduce his warning, with the prior and one or two of the knights in Ulrich's following standing so near. 'This is the story of Sodonca, Queen of Pritania, and this tells how Knight Pontus was seven times led to gallows tree.'

'On my faith I know not whether to esteem him

most lucky or ill-fated! And this is the Rose Garden?'

'Yes, my lord, but not the old tale—this is but a herbal, dealing also with horoscopes and palmistry. And this is the legend of Adam and Eve, and tells how Adam was set in Paradise to create good and useful animals by striking the river Euphrates with his rod, but Eve must needs do the same, and every time she struck the stream a noxious and evil one leaped forth.'

'Aye, 'twas ever so; whenever a woman meddles, 'tis to mar,' said Ulrich, with the same hard laugh as before, and the prior interchanged a look with the knights standing by, well aware that he was thinking of his wife, Sabina of Bavaria, his worst enemy.

'And this is a little book of fables from the Latin of Babrius and others,' continued Hildemund.

'Canst read it?' asked the Duke, who seemed to have taken a fancy to the boy, much as Pfarrer Basil had done.

'Yes, my lord.'

'Let me hear. We will hold our school and rival the one yonder,' said the Duke, looking to the other end of the quadrangle, where a monk was teaching the children sent from the abbey lands to be instructed, the elder repeating a catechism orally taught, the younger learning the alphabet on glazed tiles instead of a book.

Hildemund flushed suddenly as a new idea occurred to him. His mother had passed on her knowledge of Latin to him, and he began fluently enough.

'The beasts, my lord, had rebelled against their king, the lion, and driven him from his realm, but then the fear came upon them that he might yet return,' he read.

'Ha!' said the Duke, with a smile and glance at his companions.

'Wherefore,' resumed Hildemund, 'they took counsel what to do, and the lynx stood forth and said——'

'Vulpes, my boy—a fox. My learning suffices for that much.'

'Methinks here it should be rendered a lynx, my lord.'

'I tell thee, boy— Well, what befell?' said Ulrich, checking himself, as he caught the swift and meaning look which Hildemund raised to him. 'What then?'

'If I read it right, my liege, this lynx, as I deem it is, counselled them to lie in wait for the noble lion in a narrow way, whereby they had learned he was minded to go, and there seek to seize and lead him captive—unless, indeed, they rather slew him,' said Hildemund, drawing his finger along the lines, as if to challenge the Duke's criticism of his version, not one word of which was justified by the original.

'And did they so?'

'No, your highness; a humble little hare came and warned the royal beast, and he went not by the Hollow Way.'

'He did well,' said Ulrich, instantly catching the allusion to the name of the ravine, 'but how learned the hare of this treachery?'

'The fable says not that, my lord, but hares have long ears.'

'It were well if they always used them in the service of their liege lords.' He turned away, still looking at the little volume. 'It is strange how many of the brutes prance on the crest of some proud noble,' he added, smiling. 'My lord of Eberstein, you do the wild boar honour, and you, Florian, have the king of beasts himself. The Aarbergs own the wolf, and methinks I have seen a hound and a lynx in noble bearings.'

'Yes, my lord, my own family have a hound,' said the prior.

'And the lynx belongs to Lichtenberg,' added one of the gentlemen in Ulrich's train.

'Ha!' said Ulrich, and a dark flush mounted to his brow, 'I had forgotten. Graf Lichtenberg! a plotter who is hand and glove with the League and the Truchsess. Who knows where he is now?'

'At Burgstein, whence I come, your highness,' said Hildemund.

'So! Aye, the Freiherr is his kinsman—he has lands in Würtemberg. A rough, honest churl, as I have ever held, hating the League even as I do,' said the Duke, with a laugh, 'holding it a burgher-like thing for knights to join with citizens and merchants against noble blood. You know him, Eberstein?'

'Little indeed, my lord; he has ever lived on his Burgstein lands, but he is the kind of man your highness describes.'

'Not one to mingle in plots, then?'

'My lord, he is dead,' said Hildemund, involuntarily dropping his voice. 'He died yesterday—suddenly.'

'How! And who is heir to his lands?' asked the Duke, eagerly. 'Hath he a son?'

'Only a daughter, noble sir, a little child, and after her the Graf of Lichtenberg.'

'Is it so?' said Ulrich, and fell into deep thought, whence he was aroused by the return of the abbot, purple with haste and excitement.

'My lord,' he began, breathless, 'if your highness has but a moment, it were well spent on comparing the Tacitus which this good boy has brought me with the one but last week sent me by the learned Philip Welser of Ulm, enriched by manuscript notes from his own hand. Ah, my lord, the more we contemplate Tacitus, the more divine doth his genius appear; nay, the very collocation of his words has a strength and force unknown to other authors.'

The gentlemen in Ulrich's following looked at each other in consternation. 'My lord, every hour is precious; we are yet far from Waldau, where alone we may safely spend the night,' said Graf Eberstein.

'True. My lord abbot, I fear that the pleasure you offer me must be for another time, the more that I would speak to you once more of my matters. Gentlemen, I will not keep you long waiting,' said Ulrich, turning towards the passage leading to the abbot's house, but looking back to say, 'Tarry my return, fair boy. I like your little book, and will buy it.'

Abbot Johannes had no choice but to follow, which

he did, looking very rueful, and as if his heart led him so strongly back to the convent library that his limbs could hardly move in this contrary direction.

The delay was quite as unwelcome to those left behind. Ulrich's friends were well aware how great a risk he ran in having left Hohentwiel at all, and that all hope of success in his enterprise depended on swift action, were astonished and perplexed by this loss of time, and the prior was longing for a quiet moment in which to examine and secure the books and pamphlets which he had commissioned Hildemund to procure for him. The precentor wanted to note down the air which had taken his fancy, and sundry novices and brethren were looking forward to hearing something of the outside world from him. There was no very strict discipline at Sanct Anna, unless a monotonous life could be called so, and no such devotion as uplifted those who had renounced the world into a region above it. Even to Prior Lucas religious questions were more a matter of intellect than heart or soul, and the abbot himself had a touch of paganism in him, like numerous other learned men of the time, though in Germany the spirit of the age tended towards moral reform, while in Italy its tendency was towards a new birth of art and science consistent with deep corruption.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE many minutes had passed a brother came to summon Hildemund to the abbot's presence. Those left behind looked at each other questioningly, and the knights who had attended Ulrich showed uneasy displeasure.

'This delay will be fatal!' said Graf Eberstein, with deep vexation. 'Surely the Duke is beside himself thus to linger. It will be high noon ere we are on our way, and if once the rumour get abroad that he is without the walls of Hohentwiel, a hundred enemies will be afoot, and all hope of striking a sudden blow

lost once more. You will scarce see your fair betrothed this time, Junker Florian.'

Both lords were among the faithful few who had clung to Ulrich through his misfortunes, and the lands of both had been seized and confiscated by the League.

'Had the Chancellor knowledge of the scheme?' asked the prior, lowering his voice. They assented by a look, which conveyed their regret that it should be so. There were those who traced half Ulrich's misfortunes to his obstinate trust in his chancellor, the wily Ambrosius Volland. The prior's glance responded, but being a cautious man he did not put his thoughts into words, and changed the subject by a suggestion that, as they had broken their fast early and slightly, another meal would not be amiss, and led the way to the refectory, followed by the knights, while their attendants led the horses up and down waiting for their return.

Hildemund found Abbot Johannes and his guest sitting in silence. The abbot's full and florid cheeks were almost pale, and a furrow had appeared on his brow, as if he heartily regretted having disturbed his learned leisure by meddling in affairs outside of his monastery. It deepened as he reflected on his discovery that Ulrich was lending an ear to the teaching of Melancthon and Luther, for not only did this make it a delicate matter for an orthodox prelate to assist him, but it rendered the breach between him and the fanatical House of Bavaria hopeless.

The Duke sat stern and gloomy, twisting in his fingers one of the long light brown tresses which had gained him as a boy his name of Ulrich of the Curly Locks, and his voice had a menacing sound in it as he called to Hildemund as soon as the monk who had conducted him had departed, 'Come hither, boy, and speak to the point. Dost know of treachery towards me? How? Who sent thee to warn me?'

The short, stern questions had a roll as of thunder in them. Hildemund answered briefly and clearly, and the abbot looked more and more disturbed.

'It would seem that all is known,' he said, in great disquiet.

'Even so,' answered Ulrich, curtly; and then, with a burst of the violence which all who knew him dreaded, 'I would I knew who plays the traitor to my secret counsels; he should have a short shrift and speedy guerdon. Pah! who would be a prince? There is treachery in the very air we breathe!'

He started up, and walked up and down the room in great agitation.

'My lord, my dear lord, I pray you look not so wildly,' urged the abbot, rising too, but sitting down again in helpless perplexity.

'What! would you have me smile and speak smoothly, and say 'tis no matter that my words, scarce breathed to myself, are carried to mine enemies, so that they can lie in wait for me at their pleasure? Did I but so much as suspect who the false friend can be—a dagger were too good for him!'

'My lord! my lord! speak not of daggers,' expostulated the abbot, in affright. 'Once already——'

'Dare you call that to my mind?' thundered Ulrich, turning upon him, so that the abbot blinked and turned ashy-pale. The Duke stood struggling with himself, and Hildemund, wishing himself a hundred miles away, could not but know that the unlucky speech of the abbot had recalled that fatal strife, the details of which were never clearly known, when the Duke's false friend, Von Hutten, fell by his hand. There was dead silence until Ulrich spoke again, seating himself once more, pale and exhausted with the mental conflict. 'It boots not to think of it. Eberstein and Florian Düringsfeld have proved their truth by all sacrifices that man can make, and my chancellor would scarce betray counsel . . . nay, nay, look not so, good friend; I know how tongues wag against Master Volland, but I heed them not.'

'More's the pity,' muttered Abbot Johannes. 'And now, what to do, my lord?'

'Return to Hohentwiel; but Ulrich of Würtemberg

lives yet, and that shall his enemies know before the year is out. Aye, I feel that the tide is turning; my star rises again; I shall yet sit in my palace of Stuttgardt, and humble these proud heads, yes, and do justice to secret enemies. What says the old Latin proverb? "The moon ever fills her horns again." '

'Yes, yes, my lord,' escaped Hildemund, with ardent conviction, while the Abbot shook his head and kept silence.

'Ah! so thou hast faith in my fortunes?' said Ulrich, his look and tone changing into smiling kindliness. 'When that day comes, ask me what grace thou wilt, and it shall go hard but I grant it. I am yet thy debtor for thy little book; that debt at least I can pay, though scarce the warning thou didst cunningly convey to me. Wilt take this in exchange?'

He threw the gold chain which he had been wearing over Hildemund's neck.

'My lord!' said the boy, almost speechless with surprise and pleasure.

'One thing more . . . methought there was somewhat of meaning in thy voice when thou saidst that the Baron of Burgstein died yesterday. Ha! have I guessed aright?'

'Pardon me, your highness,' said Hildemund, colouring and embarrassed, 'I saw not his death. His men found him sorely gashed in the Eschthal, whither he had followed the chase alone.'

'How! the boar slew him?'

'It was bruited about that he died of apoplexy, my lord.'

'Bruit me no bruits; say out what thou deemest truth in the matter,' said Ulrich, with a touch of impatience.

'I saw nothing, my lord, and I would bring no charge I cannot prove.'

'Ha! Then none saw him die?'

'Only one, who cannot bear witness; that same outcast of whom I spoke touching the lays that your highness inquired of.'

'I guess somewhat of the story. One day it may yet come to light. Were I yet ruler of Würtemberg I would sift it, for it concerns me nearly who owns the lands of this Freiherr, but it must stand over with many another matter. Thy name?'

'Hildemund Dahn.'

'No peasant's son?'

'No, my lord, my father was a soldier, banner-bearer to Graf Geyer.'

'And thou dwellest at Burgstein?'

'Not on the Burgstein lands, but those of Geyer border them.'

'I shall remember thy name. Farewell, my boy: keep silence for thine own sake of these matters.'

Hildemund bowed reverently to the Duke, and bent to receive the Abbot's blessing. The interview was over for him, but Ulrich and the Abbot remained yet awhile in consultation. However, before Hildemund quitted Sanct Anna he saw the little troop of Würtembergers ride out, escorted by a body of men-at-arms belonging to the cloister, lest the League should be lurking on the road to Hohentwiel. Ulrich returned to his stronghold, hardly having set foot on Würtemberg soil, but his bearing was as proud and dauntless as if his hopes and resolution only grew the stronger in disaster.

In the course of the afternoon Hildemund made his way to Schwanstadt, a busy little town, which had bought its freedom, and had Guilds and a Town Council, manufactures and imports. He had customers there, as well as in the Annenkloster, but not many, for the sympathies of the town were strongly Roman, and education was less flourishing than where the breath of the Reformation was blowing freely. He made his way homewards by another road, longer but safer, for he was not disposed to try the Hohlweg, where, if the Leaguers still lay in wait, they might not let him pass so easily as in the morning. He struck again into the forest in the late afternoon, journeying on until he came to the Wünschthurm, a ruin of unknown age, standing

on a rocky table-land, overlooking a sea of forest far and near.

There were strange tales about this tower, built on a spot which in heathen times had been held most sacred; the wood around was still called the Heiligenforst; many a sacrifice had been offered here to heathen gods, and even yet a certain sanctity and awe clung to the place, where it was believed that on St. John's Eve all the witches in Germany gathered and churned up the storms which would be let loose over the land from the deep well in the tower during the next twelve months.

'I am glad it is but afternoon, though mother would chide me for fearing that such evil things could hurt a Christian,' said Hildemund to himself, as he saw the shattered walls. 'I would not willingly be here at night. Now, in broad daylight, there is nought strange or fearful about the old place except that all is so still. Anyhow I must rest me a bit, for I am right weary.'

He loosed his pack, much lightened in the course of the day, and sat down to eat the remains of his provisions. The air was thick and heavy; the sky was lowering. Not a leaf moved; not a bird sang. Soon great drops began to fall, striking the leaves like bullets, and a flash of jagged lightning ran down the sky, and was followed by a peal of crackling thunder, almost overhead.

'Nay, then,' said Hildemund, startled and rising, 'I may not stay under these trees; I must see if there be any shelter within the old walls; surely it is less perilous there than here. What! another flash, and another! The storm will be a great one.'

As he spoke a bolt of fire seemed to dart down and envelope a limb of an oak tree near, in its dark autumnal foliage. The thunder broke immediately, and for a moment all the sky seemed dark. When Hildemund's dazzled eyes could see again, the great branch was stripped and bleached, a dead skeleton. He hastily lifted his pack and hurried into the tower. Roofless and open to the sky, it promised little shelter, but he espied some fallen masses of masonry over which ivy and clematis

had climbed, tangling so densely among the stones and the bushes which had grown up among them that a kind of natural bower had been formed, under which he easily crept, at least protected from the sudden heavy gushes of rain, and putting his pack under his head, he gladly stretched himself out. Weariness and the sultry air combined to weigh down his eyes; while he was yet wondering how long the storm would last, and whether the Duke were out in it, he fell profoundly asleep. For a night and the best part of two days he had been afoot; he slept as a boy ought to sleep who had earned his rest so thoroughly. Neither the crash of thunder, nor the vivid light flashing through his leafy covert roused him; nor the hardness of his couch, nor the gradual cooling of the air and clearing of the sky, which though dim and covered with light grey clouds, was no longer heavy and lowering. He slept on dreamlessly until nearly midnight.

When he awoke it was long before he could gather his senses. His limbs seemed still asleep, even when his mind began to grow active. He drew himself out of his bower and looked around him in the veiled twilight. A pale, cloudy sky looked down on him when he raised his eyes upward, and he realised that it was night, and he was alone in the Wünschthurm. He did not like the discovery. A more ill-reputed spot there was not in Thuringia, and for aught he knew, he had put himself into the power of evil spirits by sleeping on their haunted ground. As he stood, collecting his wits, he noted sounds without, strange and inexplicable at such a time and place; footsteps, and hushed murmuring voices; then a single voice, rising and falling, with extraordinary strength and sweetness. Where Hildemund stood he could distinguish no words; he stood aghast. Were the unquiet spirits of the heathen dead gathered here, in the Holy Forest, where they had held their pagan rites in life, and was this voice the voice of some hero who had ruled them, and perhaps built this tower? Strong curiosity overcame all other feelings. Hildemund signed himself with the cross,

and then, as the phantoms seemed yet to linger, and the mysterious speaker continued to address them, he seized the thick old ivy which clothed the walls, and climbed up into a loophole whence he could look down on the rocky platform below. The scene which met his eyes made him doubt if he were not still dreaming.

All around the forest lay in dark motionless masses; the moon was hidden by the cloudy veil which covered the sky, but streams of ruddy light flickered and quivered, and wavering bluish smoke rose into the air from torches thrust into the ground wherever the soil was deep enough to hold them. The glare fell on the old tower and the fragments of masonry beneath, and on the eager faces of a crowd, all turned towards a man who stood slightly above them on a broken mossy pile of stones, fallen years before from the tower overhead. It was his voice which held them all entranced, the voice which had reached Hildemund; one of those which are the rare and delightful gift of a few great orators, full of passion and pathos, heard in its lowest tones as distinctly at the very edge of a crowd as when uplifted like a trumpet call. It had been said of this man that only to hear him speak made the poorest listener feel rich and happy. In an age when physical strength and a stately person were the objects of all men's admiration, a weakling, unless indeed an ecclesiastic, had small chance of ruling others, yet this speaker, slight, frail, youthful, humbly dressed, with the broad hat of the demagogue of that day, as he stood there pouring out words of fiery ardour, his eyes all glowing and melting, his gestures slight, unconscious, but full of eloquence, held the hearts of his listeners in his hand. These peasants and miners, with their deep brooding sense of centuries of wrong; their perception that a time had come when they could make themselves heard; their dim, distorted apprehension of gospel teaching of brotherhood and equality, followed all that he uttered with a triumphant sense that one had arisen who felt for and with them, who could not be silenced, who had his own wrongs and

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those of his kindred to goad him. For a century past, mysticism and fanaticism had taken deep root in Thuringian soil. Here the Flagellants had longest persisted, and here many a Brother of the Cross had been burned. This disciple of Abbot Joachim, the wild prophet of Calabria, spoke to men but too ready to listen.

'I must go upon the face of the earth,' he was saying, when Hildemund reached his coign of vantage, 'and never rest until all be overthrown which hinders Christ's kingdom. The nobles must perish who torture and slay our brethren, and these priests, who lie in the lap of luxury and touch not the burdens which they lay on others with so much as the tip of a finger, and this Master Softlips, whom men call Martin Luther, who cries to the peasant, "Lie thou still under the foot of the rich." These are they of whom it is written, "Bring mine enemies, and slay them before mine eyes." Men and brethren, be not turned aside nor stayed, lest woe upon woe come on you and your children. Hitherto, if ye kill the wild beast which has devoured your crops, ye are but maimed or blinded; soon ye will be run through with spears. Serfs and peasants are ye now, bound to your lords; soon will ye be sold into slavery. Rise, and be ye men! Take spear and sword, and smite. He who will only have love and sweetness kills himself with honey. Humble yourself to no priest, seek no walls wherein to worship, seek repentance even as I have done; ask that ye may be burned and purged here so as ye may be saved hereafter. Stand firm and hold each others' hands, and ye shall go from glory to glory, and nobles and tonsured heads shall lie at your feet. So saith the vision granted unto me, and it cannot lie. I saw before me a field blood-red, and therein lay all princes and nobles slain, and their goods were divided among the faithful, and a voice as of a trumpet of war cried unto me, "Go forth, my disciple, Thomas Münzer, and tell these things in the ears of all people." And I have obeyed.' There was a deep murmur as he paused, lifting up his eyes as if he would have looked through the sky over him, to challenge confirmation of

his declaration. From among the crowd nearest to him, a tall, swarthy man, stepped out, and stood by Münzer.

Hildemund recognised Kaspar. 'Ye have heard,' he exclaimed, in a voice thrilling with triumph; 'we have but to obey and follow.'

'Yet mark this,' said Münzer, checking the cry which arose in answer, 'we mean no rebellion against our sovereign lord the Kaiser. I have no message against him, nor does any voice bid me overthrow his throne. Rather do I believe that if we could lay our wrongs before him, and bring to his ear what we desire, he would listen and do us justice. As yet it hath not been shown me how to lay our matters before him, but a way will surely be opened.'

'We must all be of one mind as to what we demand,' said Kaspar, 'and the matter must be laid before our brethren elsewhere. Listen all, while this messenger of Heaven shall read the articles whereon we have fallen, and if you stand by them, lift up your hands.'

There was breathless silence once more as the voice of Münzer again arose, with its full mellow swell, to read those twelve articles which became so famous later, both for the clearness and precision with which they were drawn up, and the moderation which marked them. Hildemund had drawn back as far as he could into his shelter, too eager to hear and see what was passing to quit it, but well aware of what would be the fate of a listener, if discovered. He started as he heard the articles, and recognised words which he himself had used to Kaspar. Many a time had he been the recipient of Kaspar's wrath and longings, and often too had he discussed them with one to whom he carried all his difficulties, the nameless outcast of whom he had spoken to the Duke. He it was who had felt that the peasants could do nothing unless they formulated their grievances; he it was who had suggested the very words which Kaspar had faithfully recollected and passed on to Münzer.

A hum of comment followed. 'Aye! game, fish

and fowl free to all; that is right, nor shall they ravage the fields which are God's gift to men,' repeated voice after voice. 'It is a quite unsuitable and unbrotherly thing that the poor man has no right to catch game or fish. And the false weights shall be done away whereby the bailiffs cheat us, and there shall be one coinage for all the realm. Nor shall there be heriot nor death-tax. Aye! an these things were altered, we might live. Noble and priest might live as they would if they would grant us these things.'

'That they never will,' said Münzer, scornfully.

'Say you so? Then they must go down.'

'They shall be given for a prey unto your teeth, and in that day spare neither man nor woman nor child among them! "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth," as it is written. As they have served you, even so serve them. Spare not, as Saul did Agag, lest a worse thing come unto you. But stir not until the day and the hour are come; the time is at hand, but we must not move until our brethren of Franconia and Würtemberg be ready. In Franconia alone there are fifty thousand men and more ready to join you.'

'Have I not told you all through these years that the time would come,' exclaimed Kaspar, with wild excitement; 'told you again and yet again that the Bundschuh would rise out of the dust wherein tyrants have trampled it? Think of your brethren, hanged and quartered, shot and tortured; shall not a day of reckoning come for these things?'

'No lords, no priests, no castles,' answered many voices, as the assembly began to grow more and more moved, and the first caution and timidity melted away.

'We must have the old banner to lead us again,' said a man in the throng, who, like many others there, was a vagabond soldier, out of employ, and eager to fish in troubled waters.

'Aye, the Bundschuh, and the crossed scythes . . . but how to get it made? Who will have a hand in that? Were it seen, it would bring death on him who meddled therein, and betray us all, maybe.'

'That will I see to,' said Kaspar, who evidently, after Münzer, was the ruling spirit of the meeting. Barthel here knows a man who will do it if we say 'tis but for a shoemaker's sign.'

'But the silks must be bought and the work paid for,' said the man addressed as Barthel, a sturdy, red-bearded fellow, with a spiked club in his hand, a ring of images round his hat, and a wallet before and behind, unmistakable tokens that he was of the great fraternity of licensed beggars, who wandered about under the patronage of our Lady of Einsiedeln. There was a perceptible hesitation, and a voice muttered, 'If one has to pay, one might as well give dues to one's lord.'

'I am as poor as yourselves, but what I can give I will,' said Münzer.

'And I have a broad piece here,' said Kaspar, holding out the coin which Hildemund had given him the night before.

'I sold my flax last week; I will give what I got for it,' said a thin peasant, who looked as if he had never had a full meal in his life.

'I need scarce warn you that if but one word be breathed touching these matters, the lives not only of those here but throughout the land are forfeit,' said Münzer. 'If the fiend prompt any to babble, be he son or brother or father, stop the words with knife or cord before he betray his brethren and peril the holy cause.'

'We swear it,' said Kaspar; and the crowd took up the words like a deep echo.

'Barthel and Stauffer, who know all the country round, and meet their brethren at guilds and wakes, will bring tidings here of how our cause prospers, and Kaspar will lead you when the time comes. Our watchword is, "It is ever darkest before the dawn."'

'It is ever darkest before dawn,' repeated every one, pointing down as Münzer had done to the shoe tied high on the ankle which all peasants wore.

'And now, brethren, to your homes; be silent, be ready, and the springtide shall see your enemies ground to dust and their lands given unto you. I go

my way, and I think we shall never see each other again, for my visions speak of a life laid down for the cause, and truly I think that that life is mine. So be it. Lord, I come.'

He stepped down from the spot where he had hitherto stood, drew his cloak around him, and disappeared into the darkness, which seemed to swallow him up. There was a brief hush, and then a murmured consultation among the men, who clustered round Kaspar as a recognised leader. Then the torches were extinguished, and the blackened ends flung into the brushwood, and everyone left the spot, and vanished into the forest, and the old tower stood silent and solitary under the pale sky.

It was some time before Hildemund ventured to descend, and longer before he felt it safe to leave the Wünschthurm. It was no light thing thus to have become possessed of such a secret, and he was astounded by what he had seen and heard. He went about too much among the people not to be aware that there was a deep and sullen movement among the peasantry, in which the towns were inclined to sympathise, as far as they were cognisant of it, inasmuch as it was directed against their natural enemies the nobles, but the upper classes were haughtily certain that the ruthless chastisement inflicted on the serfs and peasants concerned in the 'Poor Conrad' insurrection had thoroughly subdued them, and were blind and deaf to the ominous signs which should have warned them. Here and there, indeed, a timid or generous prelate or lord had yielded to the demands of urgent dependents, but these were rare exceptions. Hildemund had had no conception how widely and deeply the movement had spread; Münzer's declaration that fifty thousand peasants in Franconia alone only waited the signal to rise filled him with surprise, though he did not question the truth of the statement. The numbers at this secret assembly, the understanding among them, the order and discipline observed, all went to prove a state of things no doubt general. How they were thus gathered together, how

Kaspar had learned to know Münzer, and what the next step would be Hildemund could not guess. Probably the licensed beggars, who went everywhere unquestioned, and hated nobles and priests to a man, were intermediaries. That a terrible day of reckoning with the upper classes was at hand he could not doubt, yet it was hard to believe that ill-armed, untrained peasants, even when furious with wrong and passions let loose, could stand before the chivalry of Germany. Yet . . . fifty thousand peasants in Franconia alone . . . that meant incalculable possibilities. Hildemund had no secrets from his mother; he resolved to tell her the whole story of what he had seen and heard that night —her and one other. It was strange that the friend to whom he most looked up, and regarded with reverence, only equalled by compassion, should be one whom others would have looked on with scorn and shrunk from with loathing—the leper of the Eschthal.

CHAPTER IX.

THE burial of the last Baron of Burgstein was conducted with due state; masses were sung and prayers said, and there was a great banquet to which all the countryside were bidden. Then all settled down into stillness, but Graf Lichtenberg had no intention of remaining longer in this out of the way corner of the world than was necessary to secure his schemes. He wanted to visit the Bishop of Würzburg, and join Markgraf Kasimir with a following of men and a supply of money, as soon as possible, and fully explain how it was that he had not been more active in aiding that plot against Duke Ulrich which had been so strangely baffled by his sudden return to Hohentwiel. But before he quitted Burgstein he meant that such a solemn betrothal of the little heiress and his son should take place, as should be almost as indissoluble as marriage itself. It would be easy to sweep aside the feeble

opposition of the widowed Freifrau, even though backed by the faithful old seneschal, who still obstinately kept his place, though the other old servants, who had grown grey in the service of Burgstein, and most of the men-at-arms had withdrawn of their own accord, and their places had been filled by retainers of the Graf's. He had gathered up the reins of power in a calm matter of course way, which there was no one to gainsay, and ruled the whole castle as if it were his own, and as such Wolfgang regarded it, and filled it with his noisy presence, domineering to his heart's content over every one in it except old Walther, for whom he had a certain respect, and showing small courtesy to the widowed lady who was the real mistress of the castle, in right of her child. She regarded him with the intense aversion of a cold and tenacious nature, and the Graf knew that consent on her part to the betrothal could not be hoped for, but this silent, timid woman, whom the Freiherr used to speak of with a kind of jovial contempt as 'My lady abbess,' was not an opponent to be feared or spared.

But if apparently as easily bent as a rush under the wind, Freifrau Faustina possessed equal tenacity, with the strong instincts of a weak and obstinate woman of outward submission and secret rebellion. It was ingrain in her to prefer to gain her way by stratagem, and to defeat opposition by appearing to yield. The sobriquet of her husband, provoked by her nun-like dress and demeanour, was doubly appropriate. From childhood she had been educated with a view to her becoming Abbess of Rothenburg, the wealthy cloister where generations of her family had ruled, but the death of her only brother had too entirely altered her position to admit of her taking the veil, and the frightened, reluctant girl left the retreat where all her interests centred, to become the wife of a man twice her age, whose rough joviality, deep drinking, and hearty contempt for everything most reverenced by her, filled her with dismay and shrinking. Far from seeking to win his affections or gain a wifely feeling towards him,

she would have looked on such an attempt as sinful. If use and time somewhat softened her aversion and terror, and accustomed her to her life, she never shook off the haunting fear that, however involuntary, her desertion of a conventual life for a secular one, even though it were a daily petty martyrdom, was a terrible sin, to be expiated by penances and almsgiving, and above all by devoting a child of hers to a 'religious' life. Even before Rosilde's birth she was vowed to a convent. It had not occurred to the Freifrau that no more children might follow, and that the difficulty in her own case might occur over again. The desire to give her child to the Church became her one thought, filling her whole mind, and she never gave up the hope and determination to thwart her husband's plan of betrothing Rosilde to his cousin's son. Never since she quitted the cloister for the world had she known such a gleam of joy as when the kinsmen fell out, and Baron Dietrich loudly declared that Rosilde was not for young Wolfgang. Her prayers were answered, she thought; for the first time she felt herself perhaps forgiven by Heaven, and free from the pains and penalties which had been hanging over her head. The death of her husband was a shock which went deep; Walther was right when, with some surprise, he observed to his grandchild Bärbele that it had knocked many nails into her coffin. Far keener than any natural grief or horror which she was capable of feeling was the thought that this sudden, unassoiled death was a sign of divine wrath, delayed long only to crush more utterly. He had married one devoted to a life of virginity and poverty, and this was the consequence. It deepened, if possible, her determination that her child should carry the wealth of Burgstein to Kloster Rothenburg, whither she herself intended to retire, and she was quite unprepared for the smiling assurance of Graf Lichtenberg that though entirely at liberty to quit the world herself, as next male relation he controlled the future of Rosilde.

There was no one to appeal to: Duke Ulrich was in

exile; his Duchy was in the hands of the Swabian League, good friends of Graf Lichtenberg's. Freifrau Faustina said little, but a frenzy of superstitious terror seized her at the thought that her expiation might be hindered, her vow unfulfilled. She would have cast herself on Pfarrer Basil for advice and help, but the Graf knew something of him, and had no mind that so formidable an ally should be called into council. He hinted that this priest, exiled to Eschthal, was a heretic, and the very word was enough to fill her with aversion and fear. Thrown on herself, she would have yielded had anything but the terrors of religion been in the case, but these were so mighty that they made her strong. There was yet one person on whom she could depend, though she had had little intercourse with him in the years she had spent at Burgstein, and she bade Barbara summon Walther the seneschal to a secret conference. He had hardly seen her since his lord's funeral, and he thought her more nun-like, white and wasted than ever in her widow's mourning, her frail figure shaken by the irregular beating of her heart, and her dark eyes looking the blacker from their contrast to her thin and pallid cheeks. He kissed the hot tremulous hand which she held out to him, while bidding Barbara leave them. The girl went to seek Rosilde, whose voice she heard ringing passionately in dispute with Wolfgang, who seemed to take a malicious delight in irritating her. Bärbele hated the big, rude Junker who angered her little lady. 'By and bye, when you are my wife, you will have to obey me,' he was saying.

'Yes, when! . . . By and bye leads to the house of Never,' she retorted, as Barbara led her away, casting a fiery look at Wolfgang, who was as uncivil to the maid as to the mistress. 'If I were a noble and hoped to be a bridegroom, I would treat my lady otherwise,' she muttered audibly.

'No doubt! women have long hair and short wits,' answered Wolfgang, with a loud laugh at his own smart saying, while he made a vain attempt to seize her long plaits of fair hair.

Meanwhile, under her breath, and listening to every sound, Freifrau Faustina was saying to Walther, 'You know what the Graf seeks to bring about? You heard my lord say it should never be, and now he lies in his grave, and they would have me cross his will. It were sacrilege, good Walther.'

With instinctive art she made no allusion to her real feeling in the matter, but appealed to what would most move the old retainer. 'Yes, my lady,' he answered, very gravely.

She waited to see if he would say more, but as he paused, she went on even lower, but her eyes glowed with fevered eagerness. 'It must not be, Walther; it were a great sin.'

'A great sin truly,' he repeated with emphasis, while inwardly asking himself if he should tell her his reasons for saying so.

'I would rather she died, Walther. O holy Mother! how much rather. I have given her to Heaven: she is the bride of Christ. I would bid the Graf take the lands and the wealth, but they should go as her dowry. Father Philip has ever said—he told me so again when last he came—that if I gave her and them to Rothenburg, my sin would be atoned, nay, turned into a merit. And now—O blessed Mary, Queen of Heaven, help me in this strait!'

'You would make the child a nun!' exclaimed Walther.

'Yes, yes. See you not that it is the only way to expiate the sin of my youth, and that of your lord, good Walther,' she added quickly; 'it touches us both.'

Walther was silent. He was nearly as much averse to this plan for the heiress of Burgstein as to giving her to Wolfgang.

'Have you nought to say?' asked the Freifrau, impatiently.

'We are in a sore plight,' muttered the seneschal.

'If I had known that was all the comfort you could bring, I had not bidden you here. Sore indeed!

The Graf presses on the thing ere he rides to Würzburg two days hence.'

'So soon!' exclaimed Walther, in dismay.

'I will not have it, Walther. Find help; you loved, my lord. The child must hence to Rothenburg.'

'Madam, the way is long, nor would the Graf let us bear her hence. His own men keep the gates now; there is scarce one of us left in the castle.'

'She must go, I tell you. Get her but hence, and I will follow later.'

Walther looked at the eager, tremulous creature, and a great doubt seized him if she would ever leave Burgstein.

'But if I could do this thing, dear lady, what would befall you, so frail and sickly, when it were known? How could you bear the Graf's anger; it can be terrible, I wot well, and all the more that it burns cold.'

'It matters not, so she is safely away. All these years I have prayed and fasted and vowed I would atone, if only I might be pardoned and my purgatory made short. . . . Sweet St. Alexis! speak for me. If we can suffer so much here, what must the burning and purging in those fires be?'

'Dear lady, how lies any fault at your door? You came not willingly here,' said Walther, recalling, and for the first time with pity, the arrival of the reluctant, tearful, repellent bride, who had chilled all the ready welcomes prepared for her by her stone-cold demeanour.

'Alas! if I came not willingly, I have not always grieved as I ought that I left Rothenburg; I have sometimes taken pleasure in my life, and sought earthly comfort. I am verily guilty in that. Father Philip said so. Pray for me, unworthy, O blessed St. Justina! I will atone; I vow it again; children can atone for the sins of their parents; I give all I have.'

She caught at the rosary hanging to her girdle, murmuring hurried prayers, while Walther was thinking out possibilities. 'My lady,' he said presently, and there was that in the grave voice, and honourable, straightforward bearing of the man, which inspired even her timid and suspicious nature with confidence. 'If

our little mistress went to Rothenburg, strong though the sisterhood be, and ill to meddle with, it could not hold her back from the Graf, with the League and Kasimir of Brandenburg behind him. Rothenburg is no friend to the Markgraf, who dallies, they say, with Luther.'

'Mary and Joseph! is he so lost as that?'

'It is so said, madam, but though the same is bruited of the Duke, doubtless the convent would rather that the broad lands in Würtemberg were held under him, could he but regain his throne, than of the League, yet shelter our Fräulein they cannot. It is there she would first be sought. If I may offer my humble counsel, it were best to hide her for a time so near that none will think of seeking her there, and let time bring counsel as to Rothenburg.'

'But where to hide her? Who will dare shelter her?'

'You may remember Frau Magdalene Dahn, madam?'

'The fair, tall woman who came here once when I was nigh to death, and healed me with her herbs and her touch? Never, since I left Rothenburg, saw I face so calm and sweet.'

'She dwells on the Geyer lands, in the house of her late husband, the Bannwart, with none with her but her young son, a brave lad, and a gracious.'

'Is it there you would take the child?'

'Even so, my lady.'

'But will this Frau Dahn risk so much? Spare not gold, good seneschal.'

'Magdalene Dahn needs no gold where a kind deed is toward, and I think no safer place can be found for a while. Later, when the first search is over, it may be easier to bear Dornröschen elsewhere.' He gave her unconsciously his own pet name for her; his heart yearned over the little one, whose mother was so ready to part from her.

'Yes, yes, the saints have heard me; I shall accomplish my vow. But time presses, and how to have her out of the castle?'

'With your leave, noble lady, I will not speak of that; it were best you only knew she had left Burg-

stein. I would not that Bärbele knew aught of the matter,' he added, with a pang of fear lest his grandchild should be called to account. 'The Graf will question every one; Heaven grant he rest content with questions!'

'Bärbele? Sure to her the risk is little.'

'I know not that, madam,' answered Walther, angered by the indifference of look and tone.

'The aim is too weighty to let a small matter stand in the way.'

'Pardon me, madam, it is no small matter to me, nor to her parents, though it may seem so in your eyes.'

Freifrau Faustina had forcibly to gather her thoughts, set on the all-important matter of executing her project, before she could understand Walther's point of view. That he, and Barbara, and herself should all be sacrificed, so long as she could carry out her plan, seemed a very small matter, but since he would not see it so she answered, with a touch of petulance, 'I will take all on myself; the Graf shall blame none but me, I promise it. Bärbele need know nothing.'

'If you would let me take the child to-night, lady,' he said, hesitatingly.

'To-night!' Her eyes glowed; she half rose. 'To-night, good Walther?' He need not have feared reluctance.

'Yes, madam, I would fetch her when all are gone to rest, but I must be back in my place ere any stir.'

'I will tell Bärbele that I will have her to sleep with me, and I will make up a bundle of clothes for her to take. To-night!' she repeated, with the same feverish eagerness as before. Her pale cheeks grew flushed; her eyes glittered strangely. Walther looked at her uneasily. He almost felt as if a ghost were talking to him.

'The thing must be. Our Fräulein cannot wed the son of him who . . . St. Eustace! what am I saying! Yet surely this is a sore parting, gracious lady?'

'I gave her away ere her birth—she is more mine now than she ever was before; till now she has been

her father's child—but I have waited, I knew my time would come,' she said, smiling strangely, as she kissed the crucifix suspended to her rosary. Walther kept a respectful silence, but his heart turned against this woman, encased in her spiritual selfishness. Barbara noted all the rest of the day a restless excitement about her lady, an unquiet expectant air, altogether unlike her usual still and passionless demeanour. She thought it seemed more like joy than sorrow, and asked herself with increasing surprise what was the meaning of the occasional vehement caresses which her mistress bestowed on the little Rosilde, who, unaccustomed to such demonstrations from a mother cold by nature and on principle, raised great wondering eyes to her face, and showed more surprise than pleasure. 'My little daughter; thou wilt make all well for me!' she whispered. 'I give thee instead of myself. Listen, child, one day thou wilt have a new name, a beautiful name; they would not let me call thee so at baptism, but it shall be thy name in religion—Justina. Yes, thou shalt be called after the fair virgin of Antioch, who listened not to the pleading of her lover Aglaides, no, not when he called the great necromancer Cyprian to his aid, who set demons around her bed, and sent fair, sinful images to beset her thoughts, but she cut off her long hair, and offered it to Mary, and would none of the pleasures of this wicked world. Thou shalt be like her. Would not that be a blessed life, my little daughter?'

Receiving no answer, she repeated the question, laying on the child's shoulder her slender frail hand, which yet could clasp with unexpected force. Rosilde withdrew herself by a sudden movement from the touch, and answered, pouting, 'I do not want a new name, and I will not cut off my hair. She was a witless lass, or she would have married her bridegroom and ridden to church on a tall brown steed.'

To ride a charger like the Freiherr's was Rosilde's darling ambition.

'Go, thou art ever thy father's child,' said Freifrau Faustina, with a gesture of sick-hearted impatience.

Rosilde took her at her word, and disappeared. By and bye Walther, passing through the hall, found her sobbing passionately under the Freiherr's coat of mail. It was long before he could learn what had thus troubled her. To his questions had the Junker displeased her? had Bärbele crossed her? she only shook her head sobbing, but at length he caught the words, 'I will not have my hair cut off; my lord father used to stroke it. I want my lord father.'

'Ah, poor child, well you may!' said the old seneschal, with tears in his eyes.

Freifrau Faustina had no difficulty in making her preparations unobserved. Unlike most ladies of her rank and wealth, she had no personal attendants, for she led as ascetic a life of rule and discipline as was possible to her, accepting no service, and denying herself every luxury. The inhabitants of the castle were chiefly men; she had led an absolutely solitary life. The Freiherr had laughed at her ways, and been alienated by them, but he was too indifferent to what she did to cross her when she did not interfere with him. Walther found her on her knees by her sleeping child when he came cautiously to her chamber that night. 'Is it time?' she asked, eagerly.

'Yes, my lady, full time. If only the little one does not wake.'

'There are herbs that bring sleep; Bärbele has wanted me to use them for myself, but I seek no rest; I would keep vigil and pray, not indulge my vile body. Yet I think St. Justina sent her the good thought, for I could use them for the child. Lift her; you need not fear, she sleeps soundly.'

She did. Walther stood for a moment looking at her as she lay in beautiful, rosy slumber, a child to be proud of, to make a mother smother her with kisses, and feel her heart full of joy and gratitude that so sweet a creature was all her own. But this mother was only eager to see her borne beyond the walls of Burgstein, and to know the first step towards the object of her life was made. Walther fastened the little packet of

clothes on his shoulder, lifted the child on his arm, tenderly and carefully, and waited a moment that Faustina might embrace her. It never crossed her mind to do so. 'Why do you linger?' she asked, with nervous impatience. 'Each moment is precious.'

'It is so; farewell, lady,' said Walther, and he walked with noiseless, unshod steps from the room. She observed that his steps made no sound, and that he had a lamp in his hand, but that might be merely to light him through the passages. It mattered little, after all, whither he was going, or how, so long as he effected the escape. She knelt on far into the dawn, in a tumult of anxiety, hope and fear, which left little space for thinking what Graf Lichtenberg would say or do when he learned the flight of the little bride elect. She had triumphed over all the obstacles which had stood in her way; the first step was made, and surely the saints would keep the child entrusted to their care safely hidden until she could be placed in the hands of the sisters of Rothenburg.

CHAPTER X.

No one crossed Walther's path as he carried the sleeping child through the passages of the castle and into that underground way which Hildemund had traversed. He had taken good care that his lamp should burn well and long, and his only difficulty was to carry his burden safely when the path lay on a narrow ledge above the stream, but he strode on fast, his thoughts full of the questions how to place her in safety, and what would befall if the Freifrau should die. The very audacity of the scheme would probably ensure present safety. Who could suppose the fugitive within a league of Burgstein? The most pressing danger would be that some one seeking Magdalene's aid in sickness or trouble might recognise her, but this, if she would only refrain from betraying herself, was not a great risk. She had seldom

left the castle, and few who would visit Frau Dahn would know her by sight. For himself, no doubt a bad time awaited him. The Graf would know that he only could have contrived her flight, and the Graf was not a man to stop at any means of discovering where she was. Yet he could not desert his post, and leave his liege lady to bear the brunt of von Lichtenberg's wrath, little as he loved her. She would not live long, of that he felt sure. There was a deathlike look about her, which had struck him very much. He must return, come what might, and see her through the storm about to break upon her. Walther's heart was very sore at thus bearing the little lady of Burgstein out of her father's castle, and at knowing who was the real master there. Many a time he had hardly been able to control himself on coming across Kunz, though he was but the tool of another. His mind was so full of anxious thought that he had reached the mouth of the passage much sooner than he expected, and stepping forth into the open air, looked cautiously around. No one was near; all was silent and solitary, and he made his way as fast as he could down the descent to the valley, and then upward again through the forest to the house of the Bannwart. His imperative knock roused Magdalene; she thought it was some one come to call her to a sick bed or seek an urgent remedy, and looking out of the window she bade him wait but a moment and she would come.

'Who is here?' she asked, as she opened the door.

'One who brings sore peril to your house, I fear me, Frau,' answered Walther.

She recognised the voice. 'Enter, master seneschal. What! the child!'

'Even so, alas!' said Walther, closing the door, and sitting down with the little sleeping head tenderly nestled on his breast. He removed the muffler around it, and she looked lovingly at the little face, the round, rosy cheeks on which a sweeping fringe of brown lashes rested; the blue-veined forehead, and parted rose-bud mouth.

'You know all that Hildemund could tell?' he

asked. She signed assent. 'Need I say then that no choice but flight remains unless she wed the son of him who did her father to death?'

'The poor mother!'

'Waste no pity on her, Frau. Her heart is stone, I think. Her only thought is to buy her soul's salvation by giving this child, the last of her noble line, the heiress of Burgstein and Rosenthal, to the cloister.'

'Nay, that must not be, Master Walther. None may use the life of another for himself. It is a heavy sin, moreover, to pledge one too young to know good from evil to serve God in a cloister. Nay, too young to know whether it be for her good or evil. Who shall say whether the dear Lord have not work in His world for this little one? What are we that we should rudely grasp and wrest His purposes before the time?'

'So do I also feel, and truly my hope is that she will never see the inside of Rothenburg. Never liked I this Father Philip, who stirs up my lady to think herself such a miserable sinner that nothing less than all the wealth of Burgstein can atone for her guilt. Had he bidden her give her husband kind looks and words it were more Christian, and had been better for us all!'

'Yet it may well be he is a good man, according to his lights, but taught to think that whatever profits the convent whereof he is confessor must needs be right. What think you then to do with this poor babe?'

'In truth I know not; I can but wait and hope. She can fare better nowhere than here.

Walther took it for granted that Magdalene would run the heavy risk, and with the same simplicity she accepted his trust without a question. The little one began to stir; the effects of the sleeping draught were passing off, and lifting her head she looked round bewildered. 'Bärbele!' she said, and Frau Dahn noted that it was her maid, not her mother, whom she called. A great pity for the child filled her heart. Walther soothed and reassured her, and the inherited courage of her race showed itself in the little thing's demeanour, for far from being alarmed by her strange, unknown

surroundings, she roused herself up at once full of curiosity and inquiry.

'Who is that?' she asked, looking hard at Magdalene, by the dim light of the lamp which Frau Dahn had kindled. 'Hildemund's mother? And where is Hildemund? Does he know I am here? Why am I come here?'

'Listen, my little mistress,' said the old seneschal, taking both her hands, and setting her before him. 'Do you recollect how the Freiherr, your father, said he would not have you wed Junker Wolfgang? We must not go against his will now he is dead; that would be a sore thing, and a sin when he is not here to enforce his will.'

Rosilde nodded, keeping her large, limpid eyes fixed on his face expectantly.

'But your kinsman, the Graf, heeds not at all what my lord said, and would give you to this Junker, and your lady mother saw no way to hinder it but to send you here in hiding. Good Frau Magdalene will tend you well, and keep you safe, and you must heed all she says, and obey her dutifully.'

Rosilde looked from one to the other and back again. Discipline in those days was severe, but she had escaped it almost entirely, with a mother who kept her aloof, and a father who treated her when he saw anything of her as a pretty toy.

'Am I to stay here long?' she asked.

'I do not know, my child.'

'I will not marry Wolfgang,' was her next remark. 'I would rather marry Hildemund, if he were noble.'

Walther laughed in spite of himself. 'And you would do well, my little lady,' he said; 'I would for your sake he were noble born.'

Perhaps, unworldly as she was, the daughter of the great Paumgärtner family thought her son the equal of an illiterate, unmannered nobleman, less rich, for all his wealth and lands, than they. 'These be idle words,' she said, a faint colour deepening on her cheek. 'Rather let us think how best to conceal that I have anything to

hide. Many come here for herbs and counsel; she may be seen, and she has no peasant air.'

'I am not a peasant,' exclaimed the child.

'She must pass as of your kindred, Frau—a niece, perchance?'

'I like not feigning,' said Magdalene, reluctantly, while Rosilde gazed from one to the other aghast at such a proposal. 'I would rather say the truth, that she is the child of a sick mother in sore trouble, who knows not where to bestow her.'

'As you will, Frau, but keep her out of sight, and treat her as your own. What will you call her?'

'Call me!' said Rosilde, in high disapproval of all these suggestions.

'Yes, leaf of my heart! Do you think you can be the little Freifräulein here in hiding, or even bear your name of Rosilde? the old Burgstein name!'

'But I *am* a Freifräulein, and Burgstein is mine.'

'Alack, yes!'

'And because you are noble by birth you need care little whether for awhile you bear a title or not, since that cannot change you, nor take away your birthright,' said Magdalene.

The child looked at her, resentful of the grave tone, yet perfectly comprehending the argument.

'See, my little lady,' said Walther, urgently, 'Frau Magdalene risks much in housing you; it would belike cost her her life and Hildemund's were it known. You would do nought to bring harm on the roof that shelters you so kindly?'

She turned her eyes on him, and seemed trying to understand.

'I will be called Dornröschen,' she said abruptly; 'it is a pretty name, and I shall be like Dornröschen who was hidden in a long, long sleep within the magic wood until the prince came. And if you like, you may say *thou* to me.'

Walther kissed and praised her, while again explaining to her the deep necessity for caution and obedience,

and Magdalene recognised something noble in the child, underlying her petulant waywardness.

'I may not stay; it grows late,' said Walther, rising. 'Let the kind Frau take you to bed, sweetheart. May God bless and keep the last rose of Burgstein.'

'You will come back?' said the child, tears rising as she saw herself about to be left.

'Yes, yes, when I dare do so. Farewell, Frau.'

He hurried away, his own eyes very misty. It was growing light when he reached the spot where the Pöllatwasser leapt from its cavern, and he paused and looked down on the church far below. He could distinguish the stone cross of roses, the badge of Burgstein, upon it, and took off his hat and said a prayer from his heart for the last of the race. Then he thought uneasily how light it was growing, and wished he had not delayed so long on his way back. All at once he thought something more than wind or beast stirred in the bushes. He thrust them suddenly aside, and perceived a human form, crouching and peering through them, which sprang up and faced him on finding itself discovered, and Walther recognised Kunz.

'St. Eustace! murderer of my master, is it thou dogging me?' he shouted, flinging himself upon him. Though Walther was tall and robust, yet Kunz was strongly built and very powerful, and his years were fewer than those of the seneschal. In other circumstances he must have had the advantage in a struggle, but taken by surprise, terrified and paralysed by the invocation of St. Eustace, and the charge coupled with it, he wrenched himself loose, staggered, and fell headlong over the rocks. With great difficulty Walther saved himself from following him, and peered over. Kunz lay far down, a motionless heap. 'I think thou wilt tell no tales,' muttered Walther; 'would I could pay our debt to thy master as honestly!'

He made his way back and sought his mistress, to tell her what had befallen. 'Is he dead? Are you sure?' she asked, trembling. 'Heaven grant it! Had he followed, think you?'

'No, of that I am sure, gracious lady; he was returning from some errand for his lord. I bethink me that he was sent out yester even, and must have been going up before me. Either he did not want to be seen, or, perceiving me, marvelled whence I came, and sought to watch me.'

'But if it be known how this befell! He will be found and brought here, and if he yet live he will reveal that you fell upon him, and the Graf will have you to the dungeon. You must not risk that; you must be where you can reach the child, and where I can send you word what to do. You must to Marienau; Rothenburg is too far, but Prior Thomas will shelter you if you show this ring.' She drew one with the arms of her own family off her finger. 'Lose no time, but fly.'

It went sorely against him to obey.

'I am your liege lady, and I speak in the name of my lord and of our child,' she said haughtily, as she saw his hesitation; 'you have been a faithful servant; would you fail us now at this pinch?'

'No, madam, I go,' he answered, yielding to the tone of command through which he seemed to hear his dead lord speak. 'My poor Bärbele—you will seek to protect her, lady?'

'Have I not said so? Go!'

Walther obeyed, but he could not make up his mind to escape secretly. He fetched a horse out of the stables, and rode openly out at the gates. The porter lowered the drawbridge doubtfully, and looked long after him, but he had no authority to stay the seneschal of the castle, and the fearless openness of his departure lulled suspicion. He rode hard for some hours, but no one followed, and by the afternoon he was safe in Marienau.

The first to discover Rosilde's absence was Bärbele, but her exclamations were coldly and sternly checked by her lady, and she guessed enough to say nothing. In the course of the day some peasants discovered Kunz, and brought him in, so battered and stunned that for many hours he could give no account of himself, and

even when he could speak he rambled incoherently about the Freiherr and St. Eustace and the seneschal, and uttered maledictions on the saint for thus unfairly taking vengeance on him when he had been absolved, and was prepared to buy an indulgence at the very first opportunity. His master's suspicions were at once awakened, and he proceeded to the chamber of the Freifrau. She was sitting in her tall, carved chair, and met him with a look so triumphant and defiant that he at once exclaimed, 'What foul plot is here? Where is the child?'

'Out of your hands, by the help of heaven,' she answered.

He saw it all at once. By the aid of the seneschal she had conjured the girl out of the castle. He bent upon her one of those malignant looks which no one could meet without a shudder. 'Is it so?' he said. 'That we shall see.'

She trembled from head to foot under his eye.

'Cousin!' she exclaimed, as he turned to go, 'no one in the castle, I swear it on this crucifix, knows aught of this matter but myself.'

He looked at her again as he turned to go, and smiled, and again she trembled like a leaf.

'That, too, we shall see,' he said, and left her.

She broke into piteous, terrified weeping, intermingled with prayers. Presently a messenger came to request her attendance in the great hall. She knew she must obey, and followed, entering by the door which opened on the raised part at the upper end, where were the two state chairs. The Graf rose from one, and led her ceremoniously to the other, returning to his own. Wolfgang stood near. He had fallen into a frenzy of rage on learning that Rosilde was missing, and looked ready for any deed of ill. Below the daïs stood several of the Graf's people, and Bärbele, white and scared, lifting beseeching eyes to her lady.

'What means this, kinsman? I told you no one but myself had meddled or made in the matter!' exclaimed the Freifrau, realising for the first time how much

reason Walther had had to fear for his grandchild; 'the maiden is mine own attendant, and under my protection.'

'She has taken part in stealing away my ward and kinswoman,' answered the Graf, 'and I will learn how much she knows of the matter.'

'I have passed my word she knows nothing, and that should suffice,' said the Freifrau, all the pride of her family flushing her pale face.

'I have told them I know nought, gracious lady, but they will not believe me,' cried Barbara. 'Oh, my lord! it is true.'

'That we shall presently see,' said the Graf. 'Would you have me believe, kinswoman, that the child went hence unknown to her maiden, who quits her neither by day nor night? Force me not to use means to learn the truth that you will scarce like to see.'

'You will not put this affront on me in my own castle!' said the Freifrau, livid with anger and fear, and then, as she met his smile, she wrung her hands. 'I cannot speak, do what you will. Oh, my poor girl, pardon me!'

'From my heart, madam,' answered Barbara, white as her mistress, and equally resolute.

'Girl, I give thee yet time to bethink thee,' said the Graf, and there was an ominous pause, but Barbara had much of her grandfather's staunchness, and answered, 'My lord, I cannot tell what I do not know.'

'Let her be made to speak!' cried Wolfgang, who had with difficulty restrained himself until now. 'Father, let her try how she likes the way my lady grandmother used to punish her maidens when they spun ill—tie flax round her hands, and set it on fire.'

It was no unheard of punishment. The Graf nodded, and bade one of the men fetch flax and a brand. He heard the passionate reproaches and pleading of Freifrau Faustina in absolute silence.

'It rests with you to spare her,' he said, watching the flax wound round the girl's hands.

'Tell nothing, dear lady!' she cried, as she set her

teeth to endure the pain, and looked unflinchingly at the lighted torch, while two men grasped her arms.

'First one hand, then the other, then both!' cried Wolfgang, all the instinct of cruelty awakening in him.

The flame caught and blazed; Freifrau Faustina covered her face with her hands. 'Ah! Mary, Mother of Mercy, help!' she cried, as a sobbing moan escaped Barbara when the fire ran up the flax, scorching as it ran, and Wolfgang laughed aloud.

'Now the other hand,' he shouted, bending forward eagerly. 'Wind the flax thicker, you dolts! Make her feel it!'

'That knights and gentlemen should see a poor girl tortured thus!' exclaimed Barbara. 'Out upon you!'

'Hold!' cried the Graf, suddenly looking at the Freifrau. She was lying in a death-like swoon. The iron will had held out, but the frail nerves gave way. Forgetful of all but her mistress, Barbara started from the loosened grasp of her tormentors as the Graf lifted the cold hand, which dropped again like that of a dead woman. 'Malediction! the fiend is in it!' he muttered. 'Here, girl, look to your lady; she must to her chamber.'

'Are you going to let the wench go?' asked Wolfgang, in amazed and angry disappointment, as he saw her following the two men who carried out the fainting woman. 'She has told nothing!'

'She has nought to tell; saw you not that all along?'

'Nought to tell!'

'Nought, you dull block. Yet could we but have worked on her mistress through her, all had gone aright. Curses on the woman! if she die we may lose the clue.'

'Is Bärbele not to be questioned further, then?' asked Wolfgang, with persistent and characteristic clinging to one idea.

'To what avail?'

'I like to see it; it pleases me to see her all white

and shaking; I want to make her cry out, and pray for mercy.'

'Pah! what has the wench done to you?'

'Nothing,' answered Wolfgang, with the sullen disappointment of a dog called off from worrying its victim.

The Graf turned away impatiently. He could look with perfect indifference on torture the most refined and exquisite when he had an end in view, but this brutal love of suffering he could only disdain. He went to learn if the Freifrau had revived, deeply regretting that he had so strained this feeble thread of life. Barbara was using with her uninjured hand all the few remedies within reach, but the Freifrau lay long as one dead. When she slowly revived and lifted bewildered eyes to Barbara she seemed to have lost all recollection of what had occurred, but then slowly, and with tears gathering and falling, she whispered, 'All is against me. I promised to guard thee, and could not. It is an evil omen.'

'Nay, dear lady, say not so; I am little the worse, and no more ill will befall me,' said Barbara, cheerily. Shrewd enough to divine the Graf's policy, she had now little personal fear. 'Only tell nothing,' she added, in a rapid, low tone, with a look which made her mistress understand he might be near. The Freifrau looked back to her and said no more. Barbara went into the outer room, and faced him undauntedly. 'My lady must have a leech,' she said. 'I am no doctoress, and she may die on my hands.'

'One must be sent for,' he answered, but with some perplexity, for not only did he want no tales carried out of the castle, but the distance from any town where a trustworthy leech could be found rendered the matter difficult. The science of medicine was in its infancy. Even highly-esteemed physicians used methods old as the time of Galen and Hippocrates, and made one or two strong drugs serve for all diseases. The Freifrau, listening intently, heard what was said, and feebly called Barbara. 'No leech,' she whispered, 'a leech

can do nothing for me, but if the Graf have any mercy in him, let me not die without the last sacrament. Send for Father Philip.'

'Say but where you have conveyed the child, and you shall have whom you will,' he answered, advancing to her bed.

Two red spots came to her pallid cheeks; she rallied her strength.

'Never!' she said, in a clear, sharp voice.

'Then die without a priest!' he replied, turning away.

'The guilt be on you,' she answered, and closed her eyes.

He ground his teeth in anger, the more intense from being suppressed. What could he do with this dying creature, who baffled him by her very weakness? He felt sure that there had not been time to place Rosilde within the shelter of Rothenburg, and he had taken measures to intercept her on the way, but he would have given much to avoid a collision with the powerful religious house by laying his hand on her at once. It was also almost equally important to learn how she had been spirited out of the castle, and where Walther had fled: Walther, who must hold the secret of some way out, and if out, then in too, and who, moreover, the Graf always felt, had strange thoughts about his master's death. These reflections made him return to the bedside, and say, less sternly, 'I dare not deny the consolations of religion to one who deems herself a dying woman; the father shall be sent for.'

She opened her eyes, which had a strange far away look in them, as if they already beheld earth from a great distance, but she made no answer at all. He spoke again, and then she made a sign of thanks, but weakness and suspicion combined to seal her lips. He withdrew to send off messengers.

'Does he mean it?' she asked, with eagerness, which lent her a false strength, when sure he was gone.

'He means no good,' said Barbara, sharply, but then, repenting that she had discouraged her patient,

she added, 'yet I see Hans mounting in the court, and Gerhardt too. I hope he will break his neck on the road,' she added, looking at her smarting hand, which she had hastily bound up; 'the rude churl held me as though he would crush my arm. Now, dear lady, drink this, and let me lay you more easily.'

'No, no; I welcome pain and weariness as tokens of heavenly love most dear and precious. I would fain die on ashes, as holy men and women often have done—though holy I am not, alas!'

'My lady, if you would talk with Father Philip you must gather strength,' said Barbara sturdily. 'Would you let yourself die before you see the little Fräulein again? Ah, blessed be all the saints that she is out of the Junker's reach; he is crueller than a wild beast. How he laughed and rubbed his hands for joy when I blenched! I could have half killed myself for letting out that moan! Is there indeed nought I may know, gracious lady, nor do?' she added, with irrepressible curiosity, though well aware that her safety lay in ignorance.

'No, no; Walther knows what I would have done.'

She lay so still through the night that again and again Barbara stooped over her to ascertain whether she still breathed, and each time there was the faint whisper, 'Is Father Philip come?' Barbara made up her mind that she could not die until this heart's desire was satisfied, encouraged her, and got her to take a little food. Once or twice a singular, triumphant smile came on the pale lips, and she said, 'They have not found her!'

'No, madam, and they will not,' Barbara answered each time confidently.

Later in the next afternoon a leech arrived. If golden promises could have enabled him to cure his patient, the Graf did not spare them. He had not been long gone when Barbara espied a new-comer, a priest, and hastened to tell her lady the welcome news. She raised herself and looked toward the door, with a look of that intense expectation which strains the very

soul. The Graf's step was heard as well as that of the priest. They had had a short, weighty conference as they passed through the court, and they paused before entering the antechamber. 'You understand?' the Graf said, in a low voice.

'Yes, my lord, but I dare reveal nothing told under the seal of confession,' answered his companion, an old ally, who had served him well more than once, but now looked pale and uneasy. 'You do not know the penalties of such a sin.'

'Are confessions never *used* later?' said the Graf; 'are things never said by a penitent *after* confessions are made?'

'That may be brought about, perchance, and it were not well that Rothenburg, already so rich and overbearing, won such a prize,' said the priest of another monastery. He entered the sick chamber.

'Father! Ah, it is not Father Philip,' said the Freifrau, with a cry of exceeding disappointment.

'No, my daughter, the good father is sick, and I have been sent to take his place,' he answered.

Tears rolled down her cheeks, and she lay speechless and exhausted, while his exhortations fell on her weary ears. Barbara withdrew, full of suspicion and dislike to this stranger, whose looks greatly displeased her. She did not credit a word of Father Philip's illness, did not think that Hans had been to Rothenburg at all. She fully believed this man would reveal to the Graf whatever the Freifrau told him. But there she was wrong. The tremendous sanctity of the confessional overawed even such an ecclesiastic as this; he was only bent on learning what he wanted outside of that seal. A little comfort came to Faustina in his presence. Though not Father Philip he was yet a priest, and had the awful, indefeasible powers of his order. Few yet doubted that the keys of heaven, hell, and purgatory were in the hands of the priesthood; even after death the soul was yet within their reach; they were lords over the universal conscience; absolution and Holy Eucharist were theirs to give or withhold; the noblest

layman must bow down before even an ecclesiastic like this priest—venal, sensual, half an atheist, yet master over his soul. Freifrau Faustina looked through the man to his office, but in her tale of self-accusation and self-torture, though she dwelt on her vow for her child, and her struggle to keep it, she said no word of what he most desired to hear. He gave her absolution, and the last rites of the dying should have followed, but he paused.

'My daughter,' he said, 'have you no care still weighing on your mind? no one whom you would commend to my prayers?'

'Yes—my only child. Pray for her.'

'You count to place her at Rothenburg?'

'Yes.'

'She is not there yet then?'

'Not yet—but soon—soon—I hope and believe.'

'Are you sure she is in safe hands?'

'I think so. Yes, I am sure of it.'

'This is a very grave matter, daughter. It must be swiftly and secretly carried out, if you would not embroil the sisterhood with the mighty ones of the earth.'

'I had not thought of that,' she said, startled. It had already troubled her that the execution of the scheme depended alone on Walther, and he a fugitive, and obliged to keep in close concealment.

'At least you have trusted one sure to place the child safely in the hands of the convent?'

"I—know not,' she answered, a sudden terror awakening at the recollection that Walther had looked with little favour on Rosilde's taking the veil.

'How! But then you are solemnly bound to take further means,' said the priest, severely. 'Would you risk failing to keep your vow?'

'Alas! what can I do more?'

'If a humble priest can aid you, call upon me, lady. Sore sin it were not to take all means to fulfil a vow so great and solemn, and touching Rothenburg so nearly.'

A long, sobbing sigh was the answer. His urgency and warnings chimed in but too well with the sugges-

tions of her own heart for her to dare resist, though she would have endured in dumb obstinacy anything that the Graf could have inflicted.

'I will tell you,' she faltered, 'a holy man would not betray me, and yet—O blessed Mary! do I well?'

'Speak, my daughter,' he said, and bent nearer to listen.

A loud shout arose in the castle court. She started up in her bed. There was a second shout.

'They have found her!' she shrieked. The priest ran to look out, while she sat rigid with terror and expectation. He turned round, with a vexed and disconcerted air. 'It is but some of the men wrestling in sport,' he said. The string of the rosary, twisted convulsively in her hands, snapped suddenly; the heavy crucifix fell to the ground, and the beads pattered far and wide over the oaken floor. Barbara in the anteroom heard it, and came in.

'What is it? did you call, noble lady?' she asked, looking at the white face which had dropped back on the pillows. 'Herr Je! she is dead!'

CHAPTER XI.

For a day or two the novelty of her surroundings amused and contented the little Dornröschen, and Hildemund's reverent and courteous behaviour to this fugitive princess was a delightful contrast to the treatment she met with at Wolfgang's hands. As long as he was at home, devoted to her, she was satisfied, but when he went on a journey with his books, she found it dull, and longed for Barbara, and the spacious castle hall and court, and all the stir among its inhabitants. Frau Magdalene had no easy charge in the wilful, high spirited child, who did not acknowledge her authority, and would not learn any occupation. A climax came when Magdalene refused to take her into the forest,

because she expected a poor sick peasant, whose arm she dressed several times a week.

'You cannot take me because a peasant is coming? You put me aside for a serf!' Rosilde exclaimed, opening her great eyes wide. 'Put me aside for a serf! But I am the Freifräulein, and I will go.'

'Know you not who said that even the heir, so long as he is a child, owes duty and submission to parents and guardians?' asked Frau Dahn.

'No, that I know nothing of. All heed me at Burgstein, and I will not be thwarted here. I will go back, if you thwart me, and talk to me of what some churl or serf has said.'

'Churl or serf! child, did you never hear of holy Paul?'

'Who was he?' asked Rosilde, a little impressed by the look and tone. 'Was he knight or priest?'

'A soldier of soldiers, maiden; one who feared neither wild waters, nor fell beast, nor fiercer man, in fighting for his Master.'

'Tell me about him.'

And Magdalene, at once glad to divert the child's thoughts, and scandalised by her ignorance, began to tell the Apostle's history, Rosilde listening attentively, with increasing respect and interest, until she heard of his labouring with his hands. The spell snapped at once.

'Said I not so!' she cried, starting up indignantly. 'He *was* a base craftsman. I do not want to hear any more; I will not listen. Let me go, I say. I will go home to the castle. If my father were here he would make you dearly abye your saucy words to me!'

'Nay, if you are so froward you must stay in my chamber until you bear yourself more seemingly, my young mistress,' said Magdalene, who with all her calm gentleness leaned to wholesome discipline, and was only withheld by the universal reverence for noble birth from feeling herself obliged to administer chastisement to the rebel who stood stamping her little feet, and regarding

her with flashing eyes. 'Go up thither, and let me not see you until you repent yourself.'

She was not at all sure that she was not culpably lenient in taking no severer measure, yet her heart yearned over the child, so untrained and untaught except in the claims of her birth and station.

Rosilde looked at her, gave her little head a backward fling, and walked proudly out at the door and up the outside staircase, and Magdalene remained alone, more ruffled than she could have believed possible. She sat musing while she span. What would be the outcome of this dangerous charge? What chance was there of any harmless solution to this perplexity? She fell back on her habitual thought, that where no light shone on her path, her strength was to sit still, and, accustomed as she was to sit alone and think, she lost count of time and forgot the child, until a figure appeared in the doorway, and she saw Barbara standing there with the bird, which Hildemund had tamed for the little Burgfräulein, in a cage. With consternation she thought that Rosilde would hear the well-known voice and rush down. But she did not come. Magdalene could only ask Barbara in, and bid her seat herself, asking after her lady.

'She died yesterday,' answered the girl.

'How!' exclaimed Magdalene, greatly shocked.

Then Barbara told her tale, and how the Freifrau had been buried with scant ceremony as soon as possible, the priest who had shriven her performing the service; and then, no one seeking to detain her, Barbara had quitted the castle, to seek her father and mother, who dwelt in the village. 'I would not leave the bird my little lady held so dear,' she said, 'and I have brought it here, for Kurre Murre, our cat, will make but a mouthful of it, if I take it home. Alack! I would I knew my little mistress were safe too! But we all think she is in Kloster Rothenburg. The Graf has ridden out himself, doubtless to seek her. May he never come back!'

The story took long to tell; Magdalene heard it

with deep and troubled interest. When it was told she had to look at Barbara's hand, and dress it, and much time elapsed before she was alone again, and had leisure to wonder where Rosilde could be. She went to seek her, but the room was empty, and the bird had flown.

For awhile this indignant little captive had sat full of displeasure, with a half-formed purpose of escaping to the castle, but she did not well know what direction to take, and Walther's warnings had sunk deeply into her mind. She looked out and saw two squirrels chasing each other in a tree, and laughed in sudden delight; all her childish anger was gone, like a cloud absorbed by the sun into blue air. They disappeared after a while, and she leant listlessly against the open window, and was asking herself if she should go down to Frau Dahn, when the familiar dress and figure of Barbara appeared at the edge of the rocky platform. Leaning out in an ecstasy of delight she waited to call her and make her look up with a start, until she should pass below, and that brief pause gave her time to recollect her promise never to show herself to anyone who might come. 'Not to Bärbele?' she had asked, and Walther had said, 'No; it might bring ill on poor Bärbele.' And she had plighted her word. Walther had told her it was as base of a girl as for a knight to break it, and that no Burgstein could possibly do such a thing. Tears brimmed over; the struggle was a very hard one in the little breast.

'And Bärbele has my Dompfaff!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, I do want to see her and my bird!'

She had regretted her Dompfaff many times, and its presence made the effort to keep her promise heroic.

'I cannot stay here if I must not go to them,' the little maiden exclaimed, after waiting a while in the hope of being summoned. 'I shall go and pick berries in the forest, where Hildemund got them for me.'

She had forgotten Magdalene's orders to stay where she was, and only looked on her flight as a means to avoid breaking her word. Had not the two within the house been absorbed in conversation they would have heard the little feet patter down the staircase, and seen

the childish form flit past the door, and over the open ground into the forest.

She lost her way at once, but as she found berries like those which Hildemund had picked, she did not discover this, and went on and on, fancying she was returning to the Bannwart's dwelling, while ever going further from it, now going along a glade, now pushing her way through the bushes, then following a narrow path, coming out at length on the edge of a precipitous, wooded ravine, with a stream flowing below, and a stretch of green turf along it. She was above the Eschthal, and exactly opposite the spot where her father had dropped dead from the cast of Kunz's boar-spear.

The loneliness of the place seemed to strike her. She stood still, and looked about with a frightened air. A little movement close by made her look down, and the pretty child's smile came back as she saw a hare erecting its long ears and looking at her. It was strangely tame, for though it would not let her touch it, it only ran a little way, and then stopped. She followed, holding to roots and branches, and finding a sort of rough path which led down to the valley. When she got to the bottom the hare ran on, and vanished in a cave. She would have followed, but stopped awestruck yet enchanted at the dark mouth, listening. The sweetest of voices was singing within to the accompaniment of a zither, and the walls gave back the notes with the marvellous, countless, magic echoes of which some Thuringian caves have the secret. It seemed as if a choir of voices were singing. Rosilde at once made up her mind they were angels. She was a daring child, and strong curiosity prompted her to go on into the gloom. She went a little way in, turned a corner of rock, and stood amazed, unnoticed by the only occupant of the cave. No daylight entered here, but, illuminated by a lamp, the walls of a lofty cave glittered with a myriad points of dazzling light; crystal stalactites hung from the roof, clear and shining as the purest diamonds, and where little drops of water had gathered and hung they shone with rainbow colours. There were tokens of

habitation in the cave. A chest stood in a dark corner, with a long wooden ladle, a bowl and a Lazarus-rattle upon it; the cask was placed near in which alone a leper might receive anything which he procured, but besides these things, the ordinary, few possessions of every leper, which he bore with him into his solitude, parchment and a red pen lay on a flat rock serving as table, over which the lamp was fixed, and beside it, sitting on a bed or carpet made of deerskin, was, as Rosilde fully believed, an angel, singing, and playing on a zither. Although instead of brilliant robes and peacock-wings, he wore a black garment and was barefoot, she thought he must be one of those whom she had often looked at in the windows of the castle chapel, or perhaps the beautiful being in the painting at the Bannwart's cottage. To other eyes he would have only seemed a young man, with a singularly refined and sweet expression, and something of both clerk and knight in his air. He had taken off the mufflings, without which he was by law forbidden to stir abroad, and either the fell disease had not attacked his face and hands, or, what was more probable, he was smitten not with the loathsome malady of Eastern leprosy, but one of those numerous others which the ignorance of the Middle Ages fatally classed with it as equally contagious and incurable. This was the more likely, that far from having the hoarse and inarticulate voice of the leper, he spoke as well as sang with clear and cultivated tones. He sprang up in consternation when his eyes fell on Rosilde. 'Ah, child! what do you here? Tarry not; go hence.'

'Alas! I meant no ill,' she faltered, backing, much alarmed as he rose. 'Oh, do not harm me!'

She dropped on her knees, and put her hands together as she did to pray.

'Nay, not willingly, little maid,' he said, sadly, 'but if you linger I may perchance do so against my will. Wait for me without.'

She obeyed instantly, and he hastily assumed his wrappings, and emerged, standing at some distance to

leeward of her, as the law required of a leper who held converse with anyone, lest his very breath should carry infection. She had never seen a leper, common though the disease was; the strange disguise, the copper girdle, the Lazarus-rattle, had no repulsive associations for her. Her arrival, and her looks of wonder, awe, and admiration were equally strange to him.

'Child, who are you? whence come you?' he asked, looking at her as she stood there, in the dress which Magdalene had made for her, such as the well-to-do burghers wore, but with a certain air which did not accord with it.

'Do you not know?' she asked, in surprise that an angel should be ignorant of anything. 'I am—Dornröschen.'

She recollected her promise and kept it, though doubtful whether in the present case she did right.

'The little Fräulein! Rosilde von Burgstein!' he exclaimed, with sudden interest, in a tone in which there was a touch of tenderness.

'They call me Dornröschen now, because, you know, I am in hiding,' she answered, with a childish importance and dignity which made him smile. 'Walther took me in the night to Frau Dahn, and he wanted me to call her *Muhme*, but we are not really of kin; for I am noble.'

'Truly I think her nobler than any ancient name could make her,' said Ulfric; 'and methinks she should find you very thankful and obedient.'

Rosilde drooped her head, and he smiled again as he saw that his arrow had hit the mark. 'None are so noble as they who do noble deeds,' he added. 'But how come you so far away from shelter?'

'I lost my way, and then the hare— Ah, there it is!' she cried, too much pleased not to forget her awe, as the brown creature came running to Ulfric's feet. Protected by his presence, it let her take it in her arms, and a feeling of pleasure, and almost of gladness, such as he had not known for years, came over him, as he saw the pretty child, to whom he appeared no object of

horror or repulsion, hold the little creature which he had tamed and loved, in her arms.

'And then I heard you singing,' she said, shyly, dropping her voice as if doubtful how he would take it, 'and all the others singing too.'

He thought she meant the echoes. 'They answer me sweetly,' he said; 'but now, little Fräulein, you must return to good Frau Dahn, and wander no more thus perilously. What if the Graf came this way? or Kunz? Where is Hildemund?'

'He knows Hildemund,' she thought, and answered, 'Gone with his pack since yesterday. May I not come again?'

'I—I know not. Ask Frau Dahn,' he said, with a keen pang; 'they will know what is best.'

'I will be good,' she said, wistfully, and there was a smile in his voice, though he had not read her thought.

'Strive to be so all you can, my little one; then will yours be a double nobility. Now I will show you the way back.'

She reluctantly put the hare down, and climbed the steep, rugged way to the high land overhead. Her eyes dwelt on her guide. 'Do you wear these weeds that people may not know who you are?' she asked.

'Truly, I would not that any knew me,' he answered, almost harshly. 'Child, how came you on that thought?'

She hung her head, but presently glanced up to ask, 'Will you tell me if you are St. Raphael, or St. Michael?'

'What mean you? My name is Ulfric.'

'I did not know that was an angel's name.'

'Child, for what do you take me?'

'Are you not an angel?' she asked, and was startled to hear his laugh, less startled perhaps than he, for he did not know he could still laugh. It was laughter that turned to bitterness as he thought of the contrast between her fancy and the pitiless reality. It would be hard to describe the mingled feelings which awoke in his breast; pain, pleasure, a startled sense that after all

he had not utterly lost all connection with the world of living men, and an indescribable yearning to retain this child near him, who had no fear of him, felt no repulsion at the sight of him. Frau Magdalene and Hildemund were kind, true friends, but they were fully conscious of his condition. This child knew it not, and did not wound him either by compassion or aversion. She was just as much convinced that he was an angel as ever. 'He never *said* he was not,' she was thinking.

'Ah, there is the house!' she exclaimed presently, 'and Frau Magdalene. She is looking the other way; she does not see us.'

Rosilde ran on a few steps, and then looked back for her guide. He had vanished. That he had merely withdrawn into the forest did not occur to her; she supposed he was able to come and go unseen. Magdalene turned and saw her.

'Maiden,' she said, much relieved, yet with grave displeasure; 'how is this? Is it thus you obey me?'

'I did obey,' answered Rosilde, hotly, but mindful of Ulfric's words she added, in another tone, 'I saw Bärbele, and I put my hands over my ears not to hear her voice, but I had to go away. I did so want to see her. Did she leave my Dompfaff?'

'Is this wherefore you ran away into the forest?' asked Magdalene, astonished.

'Yes, because I had promised.'

Magdalene had the rare gift of knowing when to trust implicitly. 'You have kept your word as a noble maiden should, dear child,' she said, colouring with glad pleasure; 'it was a hard trial, but do not thus again; think if you had met the Graf.'

'*He* said that,' thought Rosilde, impressed by the coincidence, though she only asked, 'Did Bärbele leave my bird? Is she coming again? Am I to go home?'

Magdalene had to tell her of her mother's death, somewhat fearing the effect, for she had evidently greatly pined for her father, but she listened silently—surprise seemed her prevailing feeling.

'You will not send me back to Wolfgang?' she asked anxiously. Reassured on that point she sat playing with her bird, much less turbulently than usual, and seemed thinking. Magdalene wondered if she understood what had happened. She did not say a word about her visit to the Eschthal. It was her own wondrous, delightful secret, to be shared with no one, unless some day with Hildemund. Only she perplexed Magdalene by asking if there were an angel called Ulfric, and when told she knew of none so named, she said, 'Perchance there is one you have not heard of then,' and would give no further explanation. But she called Frau Dahn 'Muhme' when she addressed her, and put her little mouth up to be kissed when laid in her bed that night, a thing which she had never before done.

CHAPTER XII.

Pfarrer Basil had not revisited the Bannwart's house. Certain new writings of Luther's had reached him, and raised a storm within him which had driven him to put forth a vehement reply, and to preach a discourse so full of passionate denunciation that Magdalene, who was one of his audience, listened with grieved disapproval, and went homeward with Hildemund in expressive silence. It was a time when justice and courtesy to opponents was almost unknown, whether a von Hutten were assailing a Duke of Würtemberg with every weapon which calumny and personal hatred could forge, or a Scaliger accusing an Erasmus, and receiving his missiles flung back barbed with bitter jests at his own head.

But to the serene and lofty spirit of Magdalene this was grievous and abhorrent. 'I fear me this Prediger Basil is but a blind leader of the blind,' she said at last. 'He counts unity more precious than truth, yet unity cannot be where truth is not, for she alone is one.'

Magdalene could not make allowances for a nature like that of Herr Basil, possessed as it were by several spirits, and ever at war with itself. Hardly had he launched forth his reply and preached his sermon, than the revulsion came, the terrible doubt whether he had done well. Her surprise was indescribable when, only a day or two later, he stood in her doorway and said, with no greeting or explanation, 'Where be those writings whereof you spake that time I came hither? I would read them.'

Magdalene looked at him in wonder, so abrupt and sharpened by inward conflict was the tone, so pale and distraught his looks.

'They are here, dear sir,' she answered, and her voice, calm but full of gentle sympathy, seemed to soothe his mood at once. 'Take what you will, but if I may counsel, I would you would first read this little book,'—she had chosen the 'Theologia Germanica'—'written by one whose name man knows not, but surely it is written in the Book of Life. Unadorned the book is with words of human wisdom, yet rare and precious to the soul.'

The thought of these writings will not leave me,' he said, putting it hastily into his breast. 'It is as if a voice—*his* voice—bid me take and study them; and though I would not listen to him while he lived—alas, my brother, my brother!—I have no courage to harden myself against him now.'

And meeting the pitying question in her eyes, he continued in hurried and broken sentences, 'I had a friend—a friend dear as mine own soul; we walked together, and took sweet counsel in heavenly things, and he was to me all that the best, the noblest, purest of men could be. That he could go astray . . . . sooner had I believed that a saint in Paradise, an angel from heaven could err. And yet he, he, my friend—my guide—there came a time when he spake and taught things that Holy Church disallows, and I found myself no longer one with him, nay, opposed in hot displeasure—the hotter that I loved him with all the love of my heart,

and thenceforward we were not one but twain. My God! to think of Bernhard as one who misled the people—who had the guilt of souls upon his head—who died—for he died—excommunicated, shut in the blackness of hell for ever! Prayer and mass availing nought! purgatory itself closed against him! my friend whom my soul loved, and loves yet.'

'And even if he were such a sinner as you deem, dear sir, does not God who created him love him more than you can?' asked Magdalene, with joyful certainty.

'Have I not told you he died under the ban of the Church?'

'Yet may he be one of the Church invisible,' said Magdalene steadily, though well aware how startling her words were. 'Only the dear God knows who belongs thereunto. What said the great master of Florence? "None can close the Church triumphant against me, for the key thereof belongs not to man."'

'Frau, it is not thus that the Church teaches.'

'Yet it is truth,' she answered, in the same joyful and confident tone. 'Well said good Master Tauler, "Whoever is unjustly excommunicated, his condemnation becomes pardon before God."'

'Would I knew it were so with Bernhard, the other half of my soul! Deep in truth and wide must be the gulf between the living and the dead, since no heart agony, no prayer nor penance can bridge it, nor obtain any sign where his spirit is. Is there any anguish I would not hail as never did I yet any mercy, could it win me a token from him! Why if saints—nay, if the layman Bernilo, were permitted to visit hell, and return to warn men of its torments, and Alberic of Monte Casino saw in vision the souls in purgatory, may it not be mine to see with these eyes where that dear soul dwells, and, it may be, by tears, and prayer in mass to shorten his penance, unless indeed he be so lost that no sacrifice or intercession avail,' said Pfarrer Basil with agony in his quivering voice.

'Trust him with God,' said Magdalene, softly.

'Is his soul so far hence that he knows nothing of

my tears, or so wrapt in penal fires that no cry can pierce through?' he went on, unheeding.

'Nay, reverend sir, think not so. Rather believe that when you meet he will tell you that many a time it has been permitted him to stand near, and speak counsel or comfort, although you knew not it came from him. So is it with me and my dear husband, that I know right well.'

Her eyes were full of lovely light: there was a tender, tremulous smile on her lips. He looked at her with a wistful longing in his face.

'Your thoughts are like his,' he said; 'they came to mine ear with a strangely familiar sound the first time I entered this dwelling. It may be I am but yielding to temptation, yet read these books which he loved I must, though I fear it is sin, and hitherto I have ever refused to know aught of them or their writers.'

'Nay, read without fear, dear sir; it may well be that your friend's voice will speak through them, only be willing to hear and obey the inward light.'

'These last writings of the monk of Wittenberg called all back to me,' he said, as if his thoughts had suddenly taken a new turn. 'It seemed to me they were snares laid by the Tempter himself, yet scarce had I denounced them ere I feared I had done ill.'

Her silence answered.

'So think you too? Yet how can you judge the matter?' he said, with the impatience of disapproval ever strong in him.

'It is not for me to judge,' she said; 'rather would I ask your counsel, in strictest secrecy, as to a matter which touches me nearly, yet is too hard for me.'

He had vaguely heard of the disappearance of the little Burgfräulein, which indeed had filled the valley with rumours, but had concerned himself little about it, supposing her at Rothenburg. Following what Magdalene now said, with Kunz's confession in his mind, he perceived, though she did not put it into plain words, that in some way she must have learned the facts of the Freiherr's death.

'A right perilous charge, Frau. You would place her elsewhere?'

'I see no other refuge, reverend sir.'

'Wherefore not Rothenburg, as her mother willed?'

'But her father did not,' said Magdalene.

'There is no need wherefore she should take the veil, were she placed there.'

'Think you they would shelter her but with that thought?'

He knew they would not. For no less a price would the convent undertake the struggle with von Lichtenberg.

'Methinks she must abide here, until Walther claims her, who placed her in my keeping; and though she be a wayward child and a haughty, she is a sweet one too, and I were loth to part with her,' said Magdalene.

'I would see her,' said Pfarrer Basil.

Frau Dahn fetched her, and she made the deep and respectful obeisance to the priest which she had been carefully taught to make to Father Philip. Soon, however, she was standing at his knee, fearless and happy. He had an irresistible attraction for little children.

'Take me into the forest, and I will show you my secret,' she whispered. He smiled, and asked Magdalene if there were danger in taking her with him.

'Danger everywhere, but no more there than here, if you keep the wood paths,' she answered, and presently the two were walking together under the trees.

'Where are you taking me, little maid?' he asked.

'I have something to show you; I do not think he will be angry, as you are a priest, but you must tell no one. I think he lives always in the cave, because I saw a chest, and a staff, and other things there, and he has not wings, or else he hides them.'

Pfarrer Basil had to make what he could out of her story. So convinced was she of having seen a heavenly messenger that he was inclined to believe her. The temper of the time was to cultivate implicit belief in the miraculous, and discourage investigation. With some minds this effect was to suggest scepticism, but not with

Pfarrer Basil's. The child had an admirable memory for locality; she retraced her steps easily through the wood-ways, and brought him out just where she had emerged herself, above the Eschthal. 'Hush! Listen!' she said, with a finger on her lips. But no one was singing now.

'Let us go down and look for him,' she said disappointed.

'Down this cliff? Child, I think you aim to break my neck,' he said with a smile. The childish prattle and the forest solitude were balm to his weary and tortured spirit. He followed his little guide as best he could. 'Stop!' she said, suddenly, lifting an imperious hand. 'There it is! Listen!'

'No angel that, though truly the voice is sweet enough to mislead you, little maid,' said Pfarrer Basil, amused yet disappointed. 'I heard that song ere I came here, sung by a fair dame at Fulda, and again, as I left the Bishop's palace, by a market woman in the street. It hath bewitched the folk, I think. But though in the heavenly courts love reign, they sing not such songs as this. 'Tis of earth! Hearst thou? Each verse ends alike—"ich liebe, du liebest, wir lieben."'

'"Ich liebe, du liebest, wir lieben,"' she repeated, murmuring the sweet notes of this graceful and sportive love song, which, as Pfarrer Basil said, had taken fast hold of popular fancy. 'Come! he has ceased.'

Still a little excited by interest and expectation, Herr Basil followed the little active feet down the cliff as best he might, not without clinging more than once to bush or branch to hinder a slip or a fall. She stood full of eagerness waiting for him below. He reached her side almost at the same moment as the occupant of the cave, unaware that anyone had invaded his solitude, emerged from it. With a half smothered cry the priest recoiled. A leper! Rosilde's angel, the singer of the love song, a leper! At all times disease and deformity were so abhorrent to his sensitive nature that it was only by the strongest effort he brought himself to face them. Now, taken unawares, all the repulsion inspired

by the sight of this stricken outcast spoke in look and gesture. He started back with a movement as if he would have caught the wondering child out of sight and reach. 'Wretch! hast thou touched her?' he exclaimed.

'Hold!' said Ulfric, with a tone so full of dignity and profound reproach that the priest stood rebuked. 'I would harm her as little as yourself, Little one, go yonder and pluck a nosegay of those flowers; thou wilt perchance find the hare there.'

He pointed to the stream, along which there was a beautiful broad belt of azure forget-me-not, and she readily obeyed. Then turning to Pfarrer Basil, he said in the same severe and reproachful tone, 'Would you teach the only creature who for eight long years has looked on me with neither pity nor loathing to shrink from me? You, a minister of Him who healed lepers!'

The reproach went home, and Pfarrer Basil was conscience-stricken, but then, lifting his head, he exclaimed: 'Those you speak of knew their miserable estate; they sang not idle love songs, but knew themselves smitten for their sins, vile and outcast.'

'Aye so? And how would you say if you knew that the leper who sang these songs made them also?'

'How say you? You! You!—Can it be a leper to whom the gift is given to send forth those sweet words which have gone to the very heart of the people? which are the joy of the glad, the comfort of the sick in body and heart, nay, which dwell on the lips of the dying?'

'Is it so?' said Ulfric, and the deep thrill in his voice told how greatly he was moved. 'Hildemund, indeed, hath told me this, but I knew not if I dared believe it. Yes, it is a leper who frames these songs, and hearing this, I thank Thee, O God, who hast given me the power to comfort others. Verily I should know how to speak to sick hearts, for I have greatly suffered, and therefore I can speak to those who suffer too, for if I dare say it, before any can open the kingdom of heaven to another, he must first have overcome the sharpness of death himself.'

A deep blush of shame and contrition came to the face of Pfarrer Basil. '"Who comforteth us that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble by the exhortation wherewith we ourselves are exhorted of God,"' he involuntarily repeated, as the words of the Vulgate rose to his mind. 'Lord, pardon my hardness and blindness of heart! I have sinned, inasmuch as I have held one of Thine own people smitten of Thy displeasure, when rather Thou hast chastised him as a dear son, and out of his stripes consolation has come for many others. It is then from your lips, my brother, that have flowed our "Five little Springs?"'

He alluded to a hymn which had already become known far and wide as the 'Fünf Brünnlein,' and which is still sung by many who have never heard 'of that poor clerk who sat desolate,' as says the old Limburg Chronicle, 'while all Germany sang his songs.'

'It is so, father.'

Pfarrer Basil stood lost in thought. It seemed to him unutterably pathetic when he recalled the gay and noble lips which loved to repeat the songs of this man, while he moved dead among the living.

'You should be a clerk,' he said abruptly.

'I was bred a scholar.'

'And surely of no mean house?'

'Would any to whom I once belonged have me name myself?' he answered bitterly.

'Some friends you surely have?'

Pfarrer Basil could not believe that this man was one of the wretched fraternity who lived by charity, cast from hasty hands and with averted eyes. There were lepers of all ranks, and some had property, of which they were permitted the use, though they could neither bequeath nor inherit, since legally they were dead. Ulfric must surely be one of these.

'Friends? Yes, two. Hildemund Dahn and his mother.'

'Ah, truly, you have good friends there. Yet what can even they do?'

It escaped Pfarrer Basil unawares, and he repented keenly of his words as Ulfric replied, with indescribable bitterness, 'What, indeed! I know not how, dashed from heaven to hell almost in a day, eight years ago, home, hopes, future gone all together, only a miserable life that I might not take left me—I know not how I have endured until now. All life fair before me, in the brightness of my twenty-two years—then, almost before a thought of dread had entered, an outcast, the burial service read over me, the earth flung on my feet, the leper's robe put on—and I was unclean to the very mother who bare me! free among the dead, cut off for ever from the living and yet alive—yet alive! My God, what have I done, what had my forefathers done, that this thing should come upon me?'

That exceeding bitter cry rang long in Pfarrer Basil's ears.

'Brother,' he said, with tears welling to his eyes, 'in the sight of Him who chose you to bear this heavy cross with Him, you are cleaner than many whom the world counts marked as His chosen. It is when men sit in darkness and the shadow of death that they best hear His voice, if only they lose not heart, and listen. What shall I say! I am not worthy to speak to one so proved and tried. My words bruise when most I would heal!'

'Nay, not so. But the child comes again. I would not see dread or compassion in those sweet eyes. Little one, you have found your playfellow? The wild creatures fear me not,' he added to Pfarrer Basil, 'they count me not as of kin to their enemies. The little birds come at my call, and eat of the crumbs I throw them, and it harms them not,' he added hastily, 'and timid things which flee from sight or sound are tame with me. The leveret which hides yonder because she sees you, father, scarce leaves my side when I am alone. They take no harm from me, and I am the less desolate for their friendship.'

Rosilde was listening in perplexity. 'Is this not then an angel!' she whispered to Pfarrer Basil.

'Better yet, my maiden, one whom the dear Lord has chosen to carry a great cross. Brother, I may not linger, for I must take this little one home, but I will come again soon. Much might I learn from you, so God give me grace. Give me your blessing.'

'Mine!' said Ulfric, in extreme surprise, and then understanding the tender, humble nature of this man, at once so impulsive and so loving, he said, 'Peace and blessing be with you, my father; the thought of you will abide comfortably with me.'

Pfarrer Basil drooped his head, full of self-rebuke. He felt as if in his first scorn of this poor leper, he had scorned his Master Himself. He took a sad and humbled heart back to his dwelling, and knelt long in penitent prayer before the altar of his Church, yet the pain was less sharp and more wholesome than that which had driven him forth in the morning.

But when Ulfric had watched him and his little charge out of sight, such a wave of overpowering anguish swept over him that he flung his hands up to heaven, and then cast himself down prostrate on the rocky floor of his dwelling with a cry like one drowning in deep waters. 'My God, my God!' broke from his lips, 'who shall deliver me from the body of this death!'

CHAPTER XIII.

HILDEMUND had pushed further afield with his books than usual, and noted that they were increasingly bought. The stir in religious matters was growing very great; art, literature, and daily life all were becoming affected by the progress of the Reformation, and the priestly rule over body and soul was rudely shaken by it. A shudder of alarm ran through the cloisters of Germany, and here and there persecution burst forth, and heretics were tortured and beheaded. Many leading men came over to the cause of reform, some out of deep and honest conviction, others to gain

worldly advantages. Already politics were fatally mixed up with the movement, and heavily clogging the march of the Reformation; and already, in spite of the Reformers setting their faces against communism, and Luther's strong declaration that the Gospel set souls free, but did not divide lands and goods, the peasants showed signs of deep discontent and disposition to seize on the domains which they cultivated. Hildemund had opportunities of marking all this, the more keenly that his eyes had been opened by the assembly in the forest. Münzer's name was beginning to be heard as that of a wild and visionary fanatic who had not absolutely founded the blasphemous sect of Anabaptists, but flung himself so entirely into it that his name became even more closely associated with it than that of the other 'Prophets of Zwickau.' Hildemund was thinking over these things on his homeward way, when his reflections were interrupted by a beggar, carrying the double wallet, and a board with images of St. Anna and Our Lady of Einsiedeln, his patronesses. He held out a broad, muscular hand for a dole, rather as if it were a right than an alms, and indeed gifts to these licensed mendicants had come to be so considered. They levied a heavy tax on rich and poor, getting least perhaps at monasteries, whose occupants possibly thought their salvation sufficiently secure without furthering it by almsgiving, and it was a general complaint in Germany that not only had bishops and abbots become powerful temporal princes, quite neglecting their spiritual duties, but that the convents no longer assisted the poor, although it was with that view that many were chiefly supposed to exist.

As Hildemund put a coin into the man's hand, silently recognising a face which he had seen at the Wünschthurm, the beggar observed, 'You have friends in Marienau.'

'Not I. They do not buy my wares there. They are Bündisch and Roman to the backbone.'

'They give as little as they buy, plague take them! but a monk put a silver piece into my hand—'tis the

first time I ever saw the shape of one there—and bade me seek you to tell you to hold fast that you have.'

'I understand you not,' said Hildemund, looking inquiringly at him.

'Nay, I have no more to tell you. My errand is done. Fare you well.'

'Stay—yet one moment!' cried Hildemund, 'know you how the Prior of Marienau was called in the world?'

'Aye, for sure,' said the beggar, who like all his fraternity knew the history and genealogy of everyone of any note for thirty miles round and more; 'his name in the world was Thomas von Rosenthal.'

It was a flash of light, and the shrewd beggar saw it, though Hildemund only said, 'I never had speech with e'er a one of them all but the porter, who would not so much as let me enter. Saw you none but the monk who gave you the message?'

'None to speak to, no layman nor any monk that I knew. I must jog on; charity grows cold and scarce, and my wallets fill slowly.'

Hildemund laughed, for they looked well rounded.

''Tis an evil time,' said the beggar, shaking his matted head; 'know you not the prophecy, who in 1523 dies not of plague, and in 1524 dies not of water, and in 1525 is not slain of the sword, is luckiest of men?'

'Yes, 'tis in all men's mouths.'

'Aye, and 1525 is at hand. Our Lady and St. Anna keep you.'

'Farewell,' said Hildemund, and they parted.

The name of Rosenthal, that of the late Freifrau's family, assured him that the message came from Walther, doubtless in hiding at Marienau. So Dornröschen was to remain where she had found a home. He was delighted. The very peril of the charge had its charm, and the thought of parting with her grew daily more unwelcome. Magdalene understood the message in the same way, and saw that Rosilde must remain with them until better times, little likely apparently to come. Each day, however, made her more

hopeful that at least no one would suspect where the child had found shelter. Graf Lichtenberg had moved heaven and earth to find her, but he had looked too far afield. He had now quitted Burgstein, leaving Wolfgang as nominal master, with Kunz under him, and really responsible for the keeping of the castle, while the Graf went to secure his rights over it in the absence of any other heir. The League were well contented that the Würtemberg estates should be in hands so loyal to them, and he had a firm friend in the ruthless George von Waldberg, or Truchsess, as he was usually called, from the high office hereditary in his family. He it was who had organised the ambush to take Ulrich, and all his influence with the League and the Bishop of Würzburg was at the service of von Lichtenberg.

From Würzburg the Graf went on to Italy, on an important imperial mission. Fortune was at that moment shining on Francis I., and Charles V. had need to rally all his friends and allies in Italy.

It was a welcome mission, not only from the political importance it gave the Graf, but because it took him into an atmosphere congenial to him. He had at one time lived long in Italy, and it suited him. He liked the cultivated, sunny life; he was at his ease in a country where men, when it suited them, could do fiendish things, and yet neither be fiends nor be thought so, but return to their usual ways when they would, without anyone so much as lifting an eyebrow in surprise or indignation. He breathed more freely where the standard of immorality was high. His own countrymen had a straightforward blundering sincerity which made them perfectly well aware when they committed a crime, and this annoyed him. Graf Lichtenberg was entirely a man of the Renaissance, as Italy, not Germany, understood it. Wolfgang, on the other hand, had his full share of that blunt honesty which made it impossible to slide from sin to virtue and back again, unconscious of any dividing line, in the graceful, easy way which made life so pleasant among Italians. It might not restrain him, but he was thoroughly aware

what was crime and what not, and would have looked with horror on the Beglionis and Simonettis and Malatestas of Italy. Had his brothers but lived, Graf von Lichtenberg could have moulded them to his will. But only this thick-headed, unmanageable lad remained, and the Graf had to do the best he could with him. Fearful at once of his plain-spokenness and of his violent temper, his father left him in Burgstein, where he ruled at his will, hunting, riding, terrifying the villagers and peasants, and exacting every toll due and tithe inexorably, while game and fish and wood were preserved as they never yet had been in the memory of anyone living in the Ilzthal. A deep hatred grew up against this lad, who already ruled with such an iron hand and seized every opportunity to chastise and torture, but as yet no one stirred. Not a sign of open revolt yet appeared. The heaving of the storm, which had made itself felt during summer and autumn, seemed to quiet down with the coming of winter; concessions here, severities there, through Thuringia and Franconia appeared to have dispersed it. Yet Hildemund, recollecting what he had heard in the Wünschthurm, and noted in his autumn journeys, could not believe the danger averted. Rather did the stillness forebode earthquake and tempest. Nothing was more surprising than the perfect secrecy observed by the thousands only waiting the signal to rise in universal rebellion; nothing could have shown more forcibly how terrible was the tyranny that could thus bind them together. It needed but a spark to fall among them to send a flame of rebellion sweeping over the whole land, burning down all in its way, and leaving a waste behind, but one on which no young, vigorous crop should grow.

Kaspar had disappeared after his father's death. Little inquiry was made for him; he had held much aloof from the villagers, and being useless from the loss of his hand, the bailiff of Burgstein troubled himself little about him. About the same time a rumour reached the Ilzthal that a hermitage, long deserted, close to the ill-famed Wünschthurm, had a new occupant,

believed to be a holy pilgrim, who lived on the sparsest of fare—roots, black bread, water from a stream. He seldom or never was seen abroad by day, and no one had had a sight of the face hidden under his hanging cowl. The foresters reported that he spent the night in prayer and vigil under the trees. Many strangers came to visit him, and the impression grew that he was a well-known, holy man. The foresters often met him, for they had an active time of it that autumn, and were at their wits' end to discover who the marauders were who killed deer on the Burgstein and Geyer lands. In spite of the extreme severity of the game laws, poaching was never entirely checked, and at this time it became extraordinarily persistent. Yet they never laid their hand on the culprit. Hildemund thought a good deal over this too, and made more than one essay, before snow raised an impassable barrier between the Ilzthal and the lonely, distant Wünschthurm, to get a good look at the hermit, but without success. Snow fell early and thickly, and blocked all the ways, until a hard frost made communication by means of sledges possible. Hildemund had made one, in the management of which he was skilful, and enchanted Dornröschen by taking her with him whenever he dared. She had grown used to her surroundings, and never spoke of Burgstein, calling Magdalene 'Muhme,' and treating her with pretty, confiding affection, while Hildemund was something between an elder brother and a devoted knight and champion. She behaved in all ways as one of the little family, and yet underlying it all was a silent but never-dying consciousness that she was Rosilde von Burgstein, the daughter of a noble race.

To Hildemund the winter brought suspension of his journeys, and work at home; wood to split, tools to mend, and, when the way became passable, constant visits to Pfarrer Basil, who could not reconcile himself to the kind of life which Magdalene, quite against her usual good judgment, he thought, allowed her son to lead. Hildemund's education had passed beyond her range, and he joyfully accepted the priest's offer to continue

it. He and Pfarrer Basil were excellent friends. He passed on a little learning to Dornröschen, who was a better pupil with him than with Frau Dahn, whom she still obeyed a little under protest, while, though wayward enough with Hildemund, and often peremptorily refusing to do what he wished, she was sure to do it when he had ceased to urge it. Magdalene foresaw possible trouble in the future; one day it might be needful to send Hildemund away, if Dornröschen grew up under her roof, for this close friendship, devoted and reverent on the one part, playful but very real on the other, could not long continue without danger, even though Hildemund had Paumgärten blood in his veins, and Rosilde was but a landless fugitive. Magdalene would sigh in spite of herself, as she looked at her one son, and thought of parting with him. To her he was his father over again, and thus doubly dear. To other eyes he was exceedingly like herself, only that the sweetness round his lips was ever ready to break into a gay and arch smile. Others, less partial than a mother, found pleasure in looking at the face, with its expression at once sweet and brave, full of intelligence, the brow fair and broad like hers, but the chin squarer, and the hair a lighter brown, and curling at the tips. He had her absolute sincerity, her rare high-mindedness, while from his father he had taken a touch of romance, a disposition to worship and idealise where he loved. Kilian Dahn had found a wife worthy of his devotion, but even had it been otherwise he would still have idealised her. It was ingrain in the man. Hildemund paid a tender homage to his mother, which often recalled that of her husband, and was very sweet to her; he thought there never had been a woman like her, no saint nobler or purer, but his lady and queen as long as he could remember had been Rosilde. In his visits to the castle when she was but a baby it had been his delight to please and amuse her, and how much more now, when she was his guest, his charge, a fugitive and discrowned. The age of chivalry was passing; the fashion of tourney and knightly vow was gone, but the

feelings which prompted them could not die, and no knight, no troubadour ever was more devoted to his liege lady than was Hildemund to Dornröschen. His mother saw and sighed, but here again her strength was for the present to sit still.

Winter, which brought so many things to a pause, cut off Herr Basil's visits to the Eschthal. He had gone often. Ulfric seemed to lay a soothing hand on his heart. In the nameless outcast he felt he had one who understood him, who felt with and for him, and was burdened with a great and heavy cross. With Magdalene he often had a curious sense of opposition, and there was the barrier between priest and woman. 'Be not a friend of any one woman,' À Kempis had said, though he wrote to men under vows, and spoke of good women, and Father Basil knew the wisdom of the counsel.

It was a strange friendship which sprang up between him and Ulfric. He never wholly lost the sense of harrowed repulsion which the leper inspired in him, and yet an irresistible attraction drew him to the Eschthal. It was a dreary time to him when the deep snow cut him off from Ulfric, and confined him among his villagers, who, as they had done from the first, treated him with much respect, looked at him askance, and shut their hearts against him. They flocked to hear him preach, interpreting his teaching in ways he little dreamed of, but he was as much a stranger and an outsider among them as the first day he came.

As he sat alone in his silent chamber, and felt that 'a solitary life is an arduous life,' his heart would die within him, and the forced inaction cruelly tried him. He sought to fill up his time in a hundred ways, but he always ended by turning to the books which Magdalene lent him, especially to that marvellous 'Theologia Germanica,' handed down from an age when souls were crying in the tumult of confusion and despair, 'Who shall show us any good?' When the world was all anarchy, the Church all corruption, and religion and order seemed phantoms, it was much to know that in such a century as the fourteenth this book could be

written. Although the perplexities and trials of a present age must ever seem the hardest yet known to those who live in it, Father Basil could scarce think his own, with all its crucial questions, its upheaving of anchors and snapping of cables, more hopeless than that in which had lived the unknown writer of this little book, who sought and found his God, when the lives of popes and prelates, laymen and clerics alike, testified that they believed in none.

Into its magic circle of calm Father Basil could sometimes enter, and find peace.

To Ulfric also the cessation of intercourse between not only himself and Herr Basil, but, for long spaces, between himself and Hildemund, was a vast loss. If Basil made him feel with wondering joy that even yet there were some to whom he could bring help and a little comfort, Hildemund was his link with the busy world of active men. Through him he sent forth his music, to travel far and wide, and bear delight with it, and wake the constant question whence it came,—a question as vainly asked as if some one would know where some lark, lost in blue air, is pouring his wealth of song. Through him, too, he learned what was said and done, and if anyone beside themselves in Germany guessed the purposes of the Bundschuh, it was Ulfric, who knew what a poison suffering can be when felt as injustice, and who, looking on impartially, understood what they needed and wanted. Often he and Hildemund had talked the matter over, and it was Ulfric who had conceived those twelve articles which had passed through Hildemund to Kaspar, and from him to the whole association, though when Ulfric had devised them he no more foresaw what the result would be than he could have told from the seed leaves of an oak that it would grow into a forest tree.

Winter was a terrible time in his cave. If in the village the weakly and the sick died, as they often did, of cold and privation, they had at least a roof to cover them, and neighbours to pity them, while the leper of the Eschthal inhabited a cavern which no store of wood,

however bountiful, could warm, and the solitude was unbroken, day or night.

He was not without consolation, however. As Herr Basil had guessed, he had means to procure whatever he needed; Hildemund sought for him anything that he desired—parchment on which to illuminate and write down his music; warm clothing, firing, books, and food. He knew that he was far better off than hundreds of his sad brotherhood, living in wretched huts, on scornful charity, or herded in lazar houses at Hamburg or other seaports, though there they were often tended by the Knights of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, a saint whom the Middle Ages had invented as the patron of lepers.

There were times when he could feel thankful for these things, though there were others when life was so appalling a burden that he scarce could endure it, and such paroxysms of despair surged over him as left him exhausted almost to death. Yet death never came, and he was a young man, and might live many years, and perhaps become more and more a prey to foul disease each year he lived, as he knew well.

CHAPTER XIV.

HEAVY rain swept away the winter snow, and made road and path for a while even more impassable than winter had done. Spring came at length, the more welcome for having been long delayed; young leaves unfolded in the warm sunshine and clothed the network of bare branches which had so long wearied the eye, except where stood the sombre pines, whose winter was their summer. A throb of young life came into the earth, and a different throb into the hearts of thousands, who were silently waiting the moment for sending in that list of grievances which they had prepared to lay before the Emperor, demanding that they should be investigated by his brother Ferdinand, Luther, and Melancthon. Strange trio, and strange proof of the

piteous simplicity and good faith of the German peasantry! Although many undoubtedly, like Kaspar, secretly hoped to seize the moment for a bitter humbling of their lords, and took for their device, 'No lords, no priests, no castles,' the majority wanted nothing beyond redress of pressing wrongs. Soon indeed, when met with fierce opposition, their demands grew and the lust of revenge awoke; but the first steps showed a spirit which might have been conciliated and directed. Nowhere were the feudal tenants so ill off as in Germany. Even those who were little farmers, far better off in material comforts than many a free peasant, were so crushed by the exactions of their lords as to be hardly more than slaves. 'Pope and kings,' as Erasmus wrote, and he might well have added, 'lords and priests,' 'counted the common men not as men, but as cattle in the market.' There had been attempts to attain freedom. For half a century the vassals of the Abbots of Kempten had struggled with their lords, uplifting for the first time the banner of the Bundschuh. Another and another revolt followed, always under the same sign, and always to be crushed by sword and axe, torture and halter. One main purpose of the Swabian League had been to put down every such attempt on the part of 'the common man.'

There were not wanting signs and tokens that might have given the alarm in 1525. A placard had been put up on the very door of the Rathhaus at Worms, signed with the forbidden name of the Bundschuh. Crazed enthusiasts went about openly teaching the wildest doctrines. Jost Fritz, an old enthusiast and a soldier, had for years been reorganising the Bundschuh in Swabia; Carlstadt stirred up Franconia and the Rhineland; Münzer laid the train in Thüringia. Yet no alarm was taken.

Although Kaspar told him nothing of his secret plans, Hildemund could not but share strongly in the hopes and views of the peasants. Ever since he had seen and heard what took place at the Wünschthurm, he had longed to be further initiated into the secrets of the confederates, and

only his mother's urgent dissuasion had held him back. All his heart was with them, and he privately resolved that when the time came, and they made an open move, he should not be slack to join them. But spring arrived, and no sign of a rising. Farm work began again, and he had much to do in the garden and the two or three fields belonging to the house. His scythe proved out of order, and he found he must go to the village to have it set at the forge. Dornröschen was eager to accompany him, but Magdalene hesitated.

'What can you be thinking of, my son? Think if any knew her face!' Impunity had made Hildemund bold; moreover, he never could resist Dornröschen's pleadings.

'Sweet mother, I will not take her there; she can await me in the hazel copse, and pick primroses and key flowers. She will keep out of sight.'

'Yes, yes, and I do so want to go! It is so long since I went out of sight of the house, and it is my name day,' cried Rosilde. 'I am ten years old to-day.'

It was true, though she looked nearly two years younger. Magdalene yielded the more readily that she knew several patients would take advantage of this sunny day to come and consult her, and she wanted leisure to compose several remedies, such as sweet basil, with vinegar and oil of roses, and a dash of barley-meal to cure the bite of vipers, which would soon abound, now that the sun grew hot; syrup of horehound and decoction of marigolds. Magdalene looked on the preparation of her remedies as a grave matter, not to be lightly approached; she held the healing art in reverence, as type of a work higher and spiritual, and never attended to a sick person without a prayer that soul as well as body might be benefited. Far from holding the ascetic's view of the body, she regarded it as a thing to be honoured and kept fair and pure, as at once a trust and a temple. To do battle with disease was an ardent joy to her. Her vocation for tending the sick combined—with her pity for the wretched, uncared-for state of the old and infirm—to make her content, and more than content, to lead the

life which she had chosen, though her Nüremberg kindred had sought to recall her on her widowhood, and had been almost as ill-pleased by her remaining in this humble station as by the marriage to Kilian Dahn, which had deeply humiliated them.

She began her work as soon as Hildemund had left her, with Dornröschen dancing for joy by his side, and she was soon too much absorbed in it to remember the uneasiness with which she had let them go.

Rosilde was wild with delight; during the enforced imprisonment while the rain lasted she had been like a bird in a cage whose time has come to migrate. What joy to be out of doors instead of carding wool, or learning to spin and darn. She danced along while Hildemund told her the name of some young bird or flower, or of the birds chirping overhead, and made her listen to the *fink, fink* of the chaffinch, and the saw-like note of the titmouse, or the loud call of the wren, strangely disproportioned to the little creature which uttered it. The summer visitants were not yet come, but he could show her the last-year's nest of a monk, as he called the black-cap, low in a hawthorn bush, and tell her how, if a hand touched the eggs, it failed not to discover the intrusion, and would break them all and leave the nest.

All these things were delightful to the child, who had rarely been beyond the walls of Burgstein until she came to Magdalene. She wanted to pay a visit to the Eschthal, and see Ulfric and his hare; Hildemund had long since heard of her visit there, both from Ulfric and herself, and he promised to take her as soon as he could find time.

So they reached the thicket, where he had planned to leave her, while he went on to the village. The thought of being in hiding amused her, and she readily promised to keep well out of sight, and not venture forth until he should return and call her. She could be trusted, he knew; yet, now that it came to the point, he wished he had not brought her. The way to Schloss Geyer passed near; some one might notice her. He hurried to the forge, resolving not to be away an instant longer than

was absolutely needful. Rosilde picked the primroses, beginning to unfold their buds and open their sweet flowers among their crinkled leaves, and looked about for a bird's nest, keeping well within the coppice, and crouching low behind the thickest hazel stems when, by-and-bye, a voice and the muffled fall of horse-hoofs on the turf told that some one was passing by. The voice sounded familiar; peeping through the nut tree she distinguished Wolfgang and an attendant, returning from Schloss Geyer, where its master had come for a passing visit. Her heart beat fast; she kept quite still, though a cry for Hildemund rose to her lips. They would have trotted by unsuspecting that anyone was near but for the hound which accompanied them, a beast which had often been petted and fed by the little Burgfräulein. Immediately scenting her, it dashed into the thicket, barking joyously. Wolfgang reined in. 'What hast thou there, dog? Hither! hither, I say!'

The hound only replied by louder barking.

'He has found some one he knows, sir,' said Wolfgang's attendant.

'Go, see who it is thus lurking.'

The man obeyed, and quickly espied Rosilde, with the dog leaping round her and trying to lick her hands and face.

'Naught but a child, Junker,' he shouted back.

'A child! There is but one child whom Astolf would greet thus,' cried Wolfgang. 'Bring her here, Hans.'

And when Hildemund came within sight of the thicket, it was to hear a shout of triumph and a stifled cry, and see Wolfgang von Lichtenberg galloping furiously off with a dog leaping wildly up at his horse, and a child flung across his saddle.

The whole party were out of sight directly, though Hildemund's wild impulse was to pursue them at his utmost speed. Sheer want of breath stopped him; he stood still and took in the full bearing of what had happened.

Half an hour later he stood before his mother saying, 'Wolfgang has found her, and the fault is mine.'

'Oh, my poor boy!' exclaimed Magdalene.

'You may well say that,' he answered, and sat down without another word.

With all her sorrow for the child, Magdalene's first thought could not but be for her son. As he sat there silent, his brow knit, every line in his face hardened and deepened, she felt as if he had suddenly passed beyond her reach, and that she—his mother—who had known all his thoughts, and been companion and friend as well as parent, could do nothing to help him.

'Wilt thou not seek Herr Basil?' she asked, almost timidly.

'A priest! To what avail?'

She had nothing to reply. It had only been a woman's impulse to turn to a priest for counsel, which prompted what she felt directly was a vain suggestion. She asked no questions, but waited with a sore heart until he should tell her more, though, indeed, she could guess nearly enough what had befallen.

'There is but one way,' he said at last, suddenly looking up 'I must to Kaspar.'

'My boy, what can he do?'

'Everything, unless all makes against us. Would that I knew the secret of the passage from without! But if I can once get by any means within the walls, I can open from the keep. I marked well how that was done.'

'You would admit Kaspar and his band into Burgstein!'

'Aye. They will find arms and provisions there. I take it they will scarce miss such a chance.'

'My boy, think what you do,' urged Magdalene, shaken from all her ordinary serenity. 'Would you set spark to this tinder and be the one to kindle a fire which may burn all who come near? What chance have peasants, be they ever so many, against knights and soldiers trained to war? What but another downfall can come, and days such as followed the Poor

Conrad rising, and Jost Fritz and Klaus Storch? But death, and heavier burdens, and broken hearts uncounted! It were a great sin to lend hand to armed rebellion, and no good comes out of evil.'

'It is the only way,' said Hildemund, stubbornly, 'they will rise whether I open Burgstein to them or not.'

'Mix not with the thing,' she pleaded, her eyes full of tears; 'this Kaspar is no man who is deeply stirred for what he deems the cause of God, as Thomas Münzer would seem to be, err he as he may. Kaspar is but a demagogue, burning to avenge his own wrongs first, and those of his brethren next, with small thought beyond. What can come of such a taking of the sword but to fall by it?'

'Would you have me leave the lamb in the eagle's eyrie, and not so much as lift a finger?' was all his answer. Never had she heard such a tone from his lips before. He had indeed, as Father Basil had prophesied, grown over her head, but in a far other way than the priest had thought of.

'My son,' she said in a trembling voice, 'I thought not to see you enter on an enterprise on which you could not have your mother's blessing.'

'Forgive me, sweet mother,' he said, his face softening for a moment; 'it must go sore indeed with me since I do so.'

But his purpose remained unmoved, and he left her to seek Kaspar, while she remained with a heart so sad and bruised as she had never yet carried in all her life. That high comfort which she could take in the thought of the husband she had loved and honoured, when his loss left her a lonely woman, was wanting now, and in her fears for the dangers which Hildemund was rushing upon there mingled too the keen regret for his fresh, joyous boyhood which was being swept away. End how all might, that would never return; this was but the beginning of changes. Magdalene covered her face and wept.

It was dusk before Hildemund reached the Wünsch-

thurm. The hermitage at its foot was empty; he pushed the door open and waited a weary time, thinking over his plans, and what were probably those of the peasants. He dared not dwell on the terror and suffering of the lost child; he turned resolutely away from that thought, to consider only what to do. That the supposed hermit was Kaspar he felt secure. It was not indeed possible to take possession of a hermitage at will, with no credentials, but they could sometimes be come by illegally. A hermit would die and his death be concealed, and some one who had reasons for hiding himself would take his place, and go elsewhere in his name, or a convent might be deceived into patronising one far from as holy as he appeared, not that the standard was by any means high. Usually no strict investigation was made. The long sleeves would hide the loss of Kaspar's hand, and he was so unusually dexterous with the one that remained that he hardly seemed to miss it. For years he had brooded over his wrongs, and those of his class, but though he saw visions and dreamed prophetic dreams as he believed, Magdalene had judged him aright when she said he was no fanatic, but a demagogue maddened by personal injuries. At length he returned, and started angrily at the sight of some one in his abode.

'What makes you here?' he asked fiercely. 'None enter without leave of me.'

'I would speak with you, Kaspar. Nay, I know well who you are; did you think I did not guess from the first?'

'The worse for you, boy. What fiend has brought you here and thrust you across my way?'

Kaspar's look and tone were alike dark and threatening, the more that they were tinged with regret.

'I am no spy; I know enough already. You will want arms and powder. Would you have Burgstein put into your hands?'

'What are you speaking of?' asked Kaspar, with increased suspicion.

'I will show you a secret way into it, you and as many as you choose, if you will follow me thither within two more days.'

'Schloss Burgstein! I have heard there is great store of arms there. That were indeed . . . But wherefore do you this? What do you know of need of arms?'

'There is one within those walls whom I must have forth,' answered Hildemund, in the same brief tone as before.

'Burgstein!' muttered Kaspar again. 'Burgstein, wherein dwells the young wild beast whose teeth are already so sharp and long! Whom would you have forth?'

'That makes nothing to any save myself.'

'What has come to you, lad? I scarce know you.'

'I scarce know myself,' answered Hildemund, with a hard laugh.

'Can I trust you? You seem to know more than you should, yet you can scarce know what hangs on this.'

'I know at least that it is ever darkest before the dawn,' said Hildemund.

Kaspar's eyes flashed wild fire under his swart brows; he caught him by the shoulder. 'How! how! you know our pass word? You are one of us? Where did you learn it? Why have you held back until now?'

'I have no heart for a long story. Will you do this, aye or no?'

'Aye,' said Kaspar, after a moment's hesitation. 'To hold Schloss Burgstein were a blow that would be felt far and wide; we must show from the first that we are no sheep to be driven back to fold by shout and crook. But there are many to warn, and the plan must be sure and clear. The time is close at hand; we of Thuringia if need be can hold our own until our brethren elsewhere have risen. It will be a gallant reckoning, and tonsure and gilt spurs shall pay their debt ere long. But mind you, I will have none with us

who fight for their own hand only; do not think to go home in peace when you have gained your end, until all can say the same. What! you say nought? Would you strike for yourself and not for those who have suffered until they are well-nigh ground down into brute beasts, and who ask but their share of the sun and air and earth which was meant for all! Out upon you!'

'Nay, surely I will be one of you,' said Hildemund, carried away both by Kaspar's strong and gloomy enthusiasm and the passionate resolution to save Rosilde at all costs. 'Could I abide by my plough or pack while brave deeds were doing? Right is on your side.'

'Aye, when men turn no ear to a brother crying for bare justice and say, "Lie thou there, the common man was made for us to set our foot on," there is no cure but the sword for such deafness. To-morrow night, then, come hither. Get you home now; I must forth and lose no time.'

'No, there is none to lose, though I think not they will bear her elsewhere yet awhile,' muttered Hildemund, returning to that fixed idea from which Kaspar's words had for a moment turned him. He rose to go, but stopped as some one entered hastily from without. 'Hast heard the tidings?' he cried, and then stopped suddenly, perceiving that Kaspar was not alone.

'Speak on; he is one of us,' said Kaspar, and then Hildemund perceived that the new-comer was the fellow serf who had checked Kaspar's imprudent vehemence on the green before the church of St. Eustace.

'So! I knew not that. But hearken: our brethren by the Bodensee, on the Lüpfen lands, have risen. Last Monday was a holiday, as ye know, and they were using the day for their own work, sorely behindhand with the rains and the time due to the Graf. What does he? Down comes an order that they all go forth and gather snail shells for the Schloss! And thereon they rose and offered him defiance, and all Swabia is up in arms!'

'My visions spake truth!' cried Kaspar, with wild

exultation. 'I knew that the day and the hour were at hand! Praise be to all the saints of heaven, who are surely on our side! And I, too, have somewhat to tell you: Hildemund, here, knows a secret way into Burgstein, and will lead us thither. Tell him thy plan, lad.'

'There is a way through the cavern whence the Pöllatwasser rushes forth,' said Hildemund; 'follow straight on, and I will—so I live to do it—open you the secret door in the keep, and you may lightly seize the gates and hold the drawbridge, and deal as you will with the castle.'

'But wherefore not go with us?'

'Because I know not how to open from the outward side. I count to scale the cliff and reach a certain postern, which it is not like any has sought to repair, and so in the darkness make my way to the keep, which is never guarded nor shut.'

'Thy plan is not amiss, yet I would we could lay our petition before the Kaiser ere we use force. If he knew how we were treated he would surely set all straight, and banish these lawyers who bring in their Roman rule whereof Germany of old knew nought,' said his fellow serf, little knowing that the Emperor had hardly more power in such matters than his meanest subject.

''Tis more like he listen if there be the clash of swords behind it,' said Kaspar, to whom the pacific and moderate desires of the mass of his fellows were highly unwelcome. 'And we should find a great store of arms and money in Burgstein.'

'It were vain to summon the Wolf cub to join us,' said his companion, 'but such castles and towns as show amity shall not be harmed.'

'No lords, no priests, no castles for me. Amity! Cloister and castle and city are all one when the matter in hand is to oppress the serf. Strike, as the Swiss have done, and have all men equal, say I. Long live the Swiss! They sheltered those who fled from the Abbots of Kempten, and they will help us now. But have your way; there are many who think like you,

Wendel; a little while will show whether priests will remit dues, and lords meet serfs as free men and equals.'

'That must they do ere we lay down the sword,' said Wendel, decidedly, 'else we give our necks to halter and axe.'

'One thing yet, Kaspar,' broke in Hildemund. 'Ask me not to fight against Schloss Geyer, come what may. My father owed all to the Graf, and I may not forget it.'

'Thinkst thou we can stay for such peevish fancies?' asked Kaspar, impatiently.

'Nay, nay, he is right,' said Wendel, 'nor is there any need to molest Graf Geyer. 'Tis a small castle, and mostly empty; we have other things to do than to waste our time over it.'

Wendel had great influence among a large number of the peasantry, and Kaspar was well aware of it.

'Have your will,' he said. 'Now to call our brothers together.'

'Were it not better we met near the Pöllatwasser than here?' Hildemund asked. 'At midnight, when the moon is going down, yet there is light enough for me to make my way up the cliff. If once I can reach the old oak!'

'Wendel and Klaus shall help thee so far; they can climb as near as may be, and then raise thee again on a shield,' said Kaspar. Thus it was settled, and they parted.

Once and again Magdalene attempted to speak with Hildemund and shake his resolution, or at least to persuade him to consult Ulfric, but he put her urgency aside, gently but determinedly.

'I could not draw back now if I would, mother dear,' he said, 'I am pledged.'

Sick at heart, she asked herself if she should forbid his stirring in the matter by that mother's authority which she never yet had had occasion to invoke; but she felt she should do so now in vain. She could not hold him back from this rash enterprise, could not prevent his taking part in what she foresaw would be no peaceful, if threatening, march of a great multitude,

content to disperse if their grievances were redressed. It would be a war of pillage and slaughter. The demands of the peasants would be met with scorn, or at best evaded; blood would flow, and when once the Bauer had tasted blood, what a savage revenge would he not take! She was astonished at her own blindness in not having foreseen long before what was at hand, and that Hildemund, so warmly interested in the cause of the peasantry, must inevitably be carried away.

'I have lost my son!' she said to herself, through the wakeful hours of that night. 'Alas! had his father but lived to guide him! Pfarrer Basil spake truth: he has grown over my head!'

And then she betook herself to prayer, like many another mother, who can do that and nothing else for her best beloved.

CHAPTER XV.

A FEW serfs ordered to collect snails upon a day which they had counted as their own—an incident ludicrously trivial; the capture of a child whose very name was unknown beyond her father's land—an event hardly more important—and yet the one had set all Swabia in a blaze, and the other was about to rouse all Thuringia. A war had already begun, which in a few weeks spread from the frontiers of France to the Carpathian mountains.

Under the cover of night, Kaspar led a picked band of confederates out of the forest, armed with such rude weapons as they could muster: boar spears and spiked staves, axes, and the coulters from their ploughs; not one had a gun or sword. What they had might serve for the moment, but the want of better arms was strongly felt, and they had hailed such an opportunity of procuring them as this attack on Burgstein offered.

Kaspar went first, bearing the yet furled banner of the Bundschuh. There was something weird and ghostly in this silent, soundless march, not a word ex-

changed nor a footfall audible. Silence had been strictly commanded, and everyone had wrapped his feet in rags or moss lest any noise should reach the watchman overhead on the castle.

They found Hildemund awaiting them among the rocks close to the cavern whence the Pöllatwasser rushed out, and then a few words were said in hushed tones before, man by man, they disappeared into the cavern, except the two who were to accompany Hildemund. The main danger of the enterprise was his. He had said to Kaspar at the cave's mouth: 'If I come not to open to you within the hour, deem I have fallen from the cliff or been taken within the castle, and get you swiftly hence, and think no more of me. But I shall not fail.'

'So deem I, lad,' said Kaspar, with exultation, as he followed his comrades into the cavern.

'If only the watchman mark nought!' said Wendel, who accompanied Hildemund. 'Since this Graf has held the castle he has perched one on the keep.'

'They keep not much look out in time of peace,' said the other.

'Aye, time of peace!' said Wendel, with a low laugh of triumph.

Then no more was said, and their noiseless ascent continued until they were close under the walls.

As it happened, the sentinel looking abroad from his lofty perch had seen enough to rouse his attention. Although the night was not a clear one he could distinguish something moving on the way up to the castle, and becoming more and more perplexed, he summoned Kunz, now seneschal, and responsible for the safety of the castle. Kunz was ill-pleased at being thus aroused; he could see nothing.

'Nay, but I saw somewhat long and dark like a band of men but now. Where be they? St. Sebald! they have vanished! They came without sound, like ghosts—as perchance they were,' added the watchman, with an uneasy recollection of a tale he had heard of a phantom host beleaguering the walls of a city all night,

and disappearing only with cock-crow. Kunz swore at him for a sleepy fool.

'Nay, have it as you will, but there again—unless my eyes play me false as they never did yet—I see something small and dark yet coming up to the castle.'

'There is nought, you dolt; you have been asleep,' said Kunz, peering into the night. 'Who should come hither at such an hour?'

'Nay, how should I know?'

'You have dreamed, I tell you,' repeated Kunz; 'my eyes are no dimmer than yours, and I see nothing.'

The watchman looked again, and was constrained to admit that he too now saw nothing. It was just then that the three had come immediately under the castle, and were clambering as high as they could towards the stunted oak into which Hildemund must mount before he could reach the narrow mouldering way which had once led all round the base of the walls.

'A watchman should know when he is awake or asleep,' said Kunz angrily. 'Think you that you are posted here to fright folks for nought out of their beds at midnight?'

'You yourself bade me be ever wary, master seneschal, since none know how he who filled your office got hence with the little Fräulein. What if he be coming back?' said the sentinel.

Kunz looked long and more narrowly over the quiet landscape, and made a careful inspection of the court and keep before he went back to his bed, but he felt tolerably secure that Walther could not know of the child's recapture, nor, if he had, could he have gathered a band such as the watchman fancied he had seen, to rescue her in so short a time. Still he remained on the alert for the best part of an hour, and then, as no further alarm came from any quarter, he fell asleep the more soundly for having been roused, while the watchman, half persuaded his eyes had deceived him, stood looking out over the road up to the castle. The sky was covered with clouds, which now and then withdrew

their veil, and allowed a few stars to shine out in dark tracts of sky. From the watch-tower to the castle court seemed a dizzy depth, and the valley was so far below that the houses on the banks of the stream looked like a handful of toys that a child might have picked up and carried away, and yet the flow of the stream and the rush of the Pöllatwasser could be distinctly heard, and the barking of a dog in the village. Usually there were two or three great boar-hounds loose at night in the court, but now that the men introduced by the Graf were strangers to them, this was no longer the practice. Hildemund had thought of the dogs, but he did not fear them; he and they were old friends. His only anxiety was lest they should bark a welcome.

While the sentinel overhead was looking too far afield to perceive anything close at hand, Hildemund's companions had reached the last ledge of rock where they could stand, and paused. Hildemund was barefoot, the better to climb, and armed with his father's hunting-knife; he had Kilian's shield too, but he did not mean to encumber himself with that. He looked up at the tree, still far out of reach, and gave the shield to Wendel. 'Now!' he said, stepping on it as the two men held it firmly, and raised him as high as they could upon it. He could just reach a projecting bough. With a swift clutch he grasped it, swung for an instant by his hands, and the next was in a fork of the branches. They saw him climb upwards, and emerge from the bough upon the face of the cliff, crawling along, higher and higher, amid the treacherous shadows and even more treacherous shifting lights, with the sheer cliff below him and the blank wall above. They looked at each other, only now realising what a service of danger the boy had undertaken, and then turned their eyes again to him, expecting each moment that he would slide or slip, and go down several hundred feet in a moment, and their hearts sank within them. They forgot the risk of being seen from the castle if they moved out of the shelter of the oak tree, and pressed

forward to watch him. That the suspicions of the sentinel had been earlier aroused was their safety, and that of Hildemund, whom he might have easily seen coming upward, but his attention was concentrated on the road winding to the castle; he never once looked down upon the walls.

Hildemund had descended this way once before, for the sport of the adventure, but it was in daylight, when he could see each projecting stone, and set his foot wherever there was a hole, or a path worn by rain; now he had almost to guess where he stepped, but he had a strong purpose filling his heart, and though he was forced to go far more slowly than he wished, he made steady progress. On the whole, it was less difficult than he expected. The rock, which at a little distance looked so smooth and perpendicular, was worn by weather and the storms of winter into countless juts and angles, and if there were no foothold he crept along below a slab of stone, and then turned upward again. After all it was less formidable by far, he thought, than the solitary journey which he had made along the underground way, amid a horror of great darkness. He was in the open air, with friends watching him below, though he dared not look down to see them. Hitherto he had crawled often on hands and knees upon the rocks, but suddenly the two below saw him stand upright on the narrow way at the foot of the wall, so unexpectedly to them that they barely suppressed a cry of triumph. Even now he did not venture to glance down into the shadowy depth below, but went on towards the old postern, with a sudden fear lest it might have been repaired. But he need not have feared. Kunz, to whom his duties were new, had been content with the castle as he found it, and though he knew there was a disused way, yet as it was certain that Walther had neither come nor gone by it, he did not trouble himself about it. No one supposed that even a wild goat could scale the Burgstein, so inaccessible did it look from the valley below, so perpendicular from the castle overhead.

The path had been once some three feet wide, and though always requiring a steady head, since there was a sheer fall below it, was perfectly practicable until time and tempest wore it more or less away. Hildemund had in fact come to the most dangerous part of his adventure, all the more that he thought peril over for the moment. He was made aware of his mistake by all but stepping into empty space, where the path was altogether gone. He discovered it in time to bound over the gap, and alight where something of a way began again. After that he stepped warily until he came to an angle of the building, which projected so as to cut off all further progress. There was not a fragment left of the road round it, nor could he in the least tell whether there were any path on the other side. Even could he pass round, it might be to find no foothold.

'I had not reckoned on this,' he thought, standing still, and now looking steadily downward.

The rock fell sheer for many feet. The high blank wall faced him. He must pass round or give up the attempt.

'My little Dornröschen!' he said to himself, and drawing his broad hunting-knife from its sheath he drove it with all his force into a crack of the rock so as to form a slender support, on which to set his foot beyond the wall. He stepped out on it, and rounded the corner to find himself again on the pathway. Kneeling down, he wrenched out his knife with great difficulty, and went on again, wondering how much more of the ledge had been crumbled away by the stormy winter since his previous visit only a few months ago. The postern was, however, but a few yards further on, and he easily removed the mouldering plank and passed through. A steep flight of stone steps led upward to a platform, but he knew there was another obstacle in the way, the heavy trap door level with it, which shut in the staircase. He came under it and tried to heave it up, but it resisted. His heart gave such a throb of alarm as he had not felt even when he rounded the angle; he thought it was locked. He bent down his head and heaved with

all the strength he had in his shoulders. It moved; only its own weight kept it down, and the hinges were still the less rusty that he had thoroughly oiled and cleaned them at the time of his mad prank in the preceding summer. They turned with less noise than he had dared to hope, though even then it seemed to him fearfully loud. It passed, however, unnoticed among the sounds usual in the castle by night—horses stamping, dogs uneasy in their kennels, some of the household astir—they drank and diced early and late in Burgstein now.

Hildemund emerged on the platform and lowered the trap-door again cautiously. He could either enter the castle by a little door communicating with the second floor, or keep in the shadow of the wall, breast high above the platform, and reach the court by a narrow stone staircase, built within walls. He chose the latter alternative. The hound which had betrayed Rosilde was chained in the court, and barked at him, but his low call of 'Astolf! quiet, sirrah!' changed its note into a whimper of friendly recognition. Hildemund crossed the court boldly, though at the gate-house he could hear voices and see the gleam of a lantern. Two or three men-at-arms were playing at cards there, but he feared nothing now; a moment later he was within the keep, and the way was open to Kaspar and his band.

'At last! We had well-nigh given it up,' said Kaspar, as he stepped forth.

'At last!' repeated Hildemund. 'Have you waited long?'

One after another were noiselessly emerging as he spoke.

'It seemed long enough in that grave!'

'Aye, I know that,' said Hildemund, with full acquiescence. 'Now the first thing is to seize the men at the gate.'

'Are Wendel and Nicklas outside?'

'I take it so.'

Kaspar turned to his band, now all assembled in the keep.

'Wilhelm, take the banner, since I cannot both hold it and strike for it. Ten to the hall, and gather all the weapons you can find. The rest to the gate, lower the drawbridge, and keep the way open. Seize every man who shows himself in the court.'

'No harm to those who will join us,' put in one of the peasants.

'If they truly will; and no mercy for such as refuse.'

They were in the court by now, and Hildemund, hurrying into the chapel, heard the air fill with shouts and cries, and curses, and the clash of weapons, and baying of dogs. The whole castle was alarmed, and its inhabitants were hurrying out to the courtyard, but his one thought was to reach the Freifrau's chamber, through the way that he had gone with Walther, for there surely Dornröschen must be. He flung the door open and looked eagerly round, and his heart sank like lead. Silence and emptiness prevailed; no one had entered here since the Freifrau was borne forth to her burial. 'Rosilde!—Dornröschen!' he cried as he stood in the midst of the dim room.

But no answer came.

'Where can they have put the child?' he asked himself, in mortal fear. 'Have they—nay; who could have the heart to harm her?'

Yet it was with exceeding anxiety that, disregarding the increasing tumult in the castle court, and the risk that he might meet some one who would stop his progress with scant ceremony, Hildemund went from room to room. More than once he encountered some member of the household rushing out, but passed unheeded in the general confusion and alarm. In an upper gallery an old woman was hurrying along, seemingly just wakened out of her sleep. 'What is it—what is it?' she cried, stopping at the sight of him. 'What has befallen?'

'Vengeance!' he answered. 'Where is the Lady Rosilde?'

'Yonder,' she stammered, bewildered with alarm.

'Good youth, let me pass; harm not a poor old woman.'

He loosed his grasp, and sprang into the room she had pointed out, one of those used by the servants in the castle, a very den of rags and disorder. 'Dornröschen! sweetheart! are you here?' he cried.

A pitiful sob answered him, and by the light of a small lamp, newly kindled, he saw a little figure crouching on the floor.

'My little queen, is it you?' he said, snatching her up and gathering her into his arms. 'My rose! dost thou not know me?'

'Hildemund! O Hildemund! have you come?' she whispered, and clung round his neck, shivering with fear. 'Oh take me, take me away before old Julchen comes back. Take me quickly, Hildemund.'

'None shall harm thee, sweetheart; I am come to take thee home.'

'Yes, yes, to Frau Magdalene,' she answered, in sobbing accents. 'But—Wolfgang?'

'He shall never see thee again, nor lay finger on my flower,' said Hildemund, tenderly, and carrying her down to the court as he spoke, with her face hidden on his breast. 'Be not affrighted; look not, nor heed for the noise. These be good friends who came hither with me.'

He stood still in the doorway, awaiting the moment when he could safely carry her across the court to the drawbridge. The combat had been a fierce one. Taken at a disadvantage though the household were, they had resisted bravely, and several peasants, as well as more than one man-at-arms, lay wounded or dead on the ground. Maddened by this stubborn resistance and by the sight of blood, the peasants were bearing furiously upon the little group of combatants, who, gathered round Wolfgang and Kunz, were defending themselves desperately, protected by such armour as they had hastily assumed, and using all their practised skill against the savage onslaught of their enemies. Hildemund could not but feel a sympathy for the gallant

front they showed to overpowering numbers, and be glad his work was not to add another to the odds against them. Borne back, they turned again and again to bay, each time repelling their foe with blows which stretched one after another on the ground, as they drew in a compact group toward the keep, answering the cries of 'Live the Bundschuh!' with 'A Lichtenberg! A Lichtenberg! St. Michael for Lichtenberg!' As they reached the open door they made a sudden charge upon their adversaries so fierce and unexpected, that the peasants gave back for a moment, and before they rallied, the Lichtenbergers were within the keep, flinging the heavy door by main force in the faces of their enemies, and had closed and barred it with a shout of defiance and triumph. A yell of disappointed rage burst from the peasants, as they battered vainly at the massive iron-studded planks with their axes and the sledge-hammers brought in haste from the forge, and poured out threat upon threat. A scornful shout, strangely distant, replied; then all was silent within the keep. 'Curses on it! burn it down!' called a voice, and in an instant half the band had scattered to seek wood, hay, straw—anything and everything which could serve as fuel.

A mighty heap was rapidly built up, a torch flung into it, and smoke began to curl upward, followed by showers of sparks, and red, leaping, flickering flames, whose glare lighted up the blank, eyeless wall of the keep and the courtyard, and the bodies lying there; and through the crackling and roar of the fire came the cries and shouts of the peasants as they watched it rise, and piled up planks and faggots and all the furniture they could find to feed it. The seasoned oak door resisted, even when the flames grew so scorching that those who were feeding them could not come within yards of the pile. But at length the blackened wood, heated through, broke into flame, amid a wild and general shout from the peasants, who could hardly restrain themselves from plunging into the fire to shower new blows upon it, but it was yet long before a way

was opened into the keep. The moment that passage was possible they rushed in, with cries of triumph and menace—only to find they were threatening deaf walls. Not a soul remained in the keep.

'By the fiend, they have escaped!' shouted Kaspar, with a gesture of disappointed rage. 'The way by the Pöllatwasser!'

None had recollected that the secret passage had been left open. Wolfgang and his men had profited by it.

'Follow! follow! we may overtake them yet!' Kaspar cried, and with many of his comrades he dashed over the drawbridge and down the winding way. Hildemund saw the court almost clear, and snatched up a cloak lying on the ground, wrapped it round Rosilde, and hastened after them. He felt sure that Wolfgang's band had had ample time to escape, and on the whole he was glad of it. There would have been butchery had the peasants found them in the keep. He could think of little but his rescued charge, as he carried or led her through the woods, encouraging and assuring her that none should hurt her. In the exultation of having recovered her he felt strong to defy all danger. Frau Magdalene almost forgot all fears and heartache when she saw them both safe, and held the child in her arms. 'My little sweeting, have I got thee back?' she exclaimed, with warm, motherly caresses. 'My little one, what have they done to thee?'

Her voice was full of dismay. She could hardly believe that this wan creature who clung so tremblingly to her was the high-spirited child whom she had parted from but two days before.

'Aye, what have they done?' repeated Hildemund, in deep indignation. 'How have they used her?'

'They—they threatened me sore,' whispered Rosilde, 'because I would not tell who had hidden me, nor where I had been, and Wolfgang told old Julchen to beat me, and she did—look! and shut me up alone, and gave me nought to eat, and—and—oh, I am so tired and hungry!'

She broke into a sobbing wail.

'My child! My little Dornröschen! Fetch food, Hildemund. Eat, little one; you are safe again with those who love you well. My poor little maid!' said Magdalene, her heart swelling as she saw the marks of stripes on the little fair arms and shoulders. Hildemund said nothing as he looked at them, but had he seen them a little sooner Wolfgang would have had to give account for each one of them. He knelt and kissed them, his heart too full for words.

'But I told nought!' said Rosilde, recovering something of her old self under the cherishing which was rapidly restoring her. 'I said they should kill me before I told. They would have punished you and Hildemund. And, indeed, I could not help Wolfgang's finding me. I kept my word and stayed in the coppice, but Astolf found me.'

'They know not where you had found hiding?' said Magdalene, with a breath of deep relief. 'It is well for us all that you were thus steadfast.'

Meanwhile Wolfgang and his followers had seized the unexpected chance which offered itself to them, though Kunz had had hard work to force him to retreat before serfs and churls. 'If I flee, it is but to take such vengeance, sooner or later, on every dog among them as shall be talked of fifty years hence,' he said at length, and with that hope suffered himself to be led away. They made the best of their way along the passage, more than one slipping into the stream and narrowly escaping being carried away by it, and threw themselves into the forest, making in all haste for Schloss Geyer, lighted by the flames which rose up, a fearful beacon seen far and wide, from the Burgstein.

The fire could burn the great door of the keep and the floors within, but could only scorch its massive walls, and would have died out for want of fuel, had not those peasants who had lingered to pillage thrown brands into the other parts of the castle, before they retired, carrying their wounded away with them. A red and awful glare spread over the sky, and columns

of smoke arose and shook out their dark and wavering banners above the flames, whose roar made all other sounds inaudible. In the valley below every dweller of the Ilzthal was astir, gazing up fearfully to the castle or hurrying to the scene. The stream ran blood-red under the ruddy glare—an ominous sight, noted by many. The sun had long risen before the fire died down, and the pure, clear daylight contrasted with the strange and threatening light of the flames, but by the next evening only charred walls, and an open gateway, and black thin ashes fluttering far and near over the valley, remained of what had the evening before been Schloss Burgstein.

CHAPTER XVI.

By the next day only the old and sick, the children and women were left in the Ilzthal and the neighbouring valleys; and not all the women either; for not a few had accompanied the peasants in their march to join their brethren, who had already gathered into a formidable army. Hildemund was gone with them, full of eager hope and generous longing to throw in his lot with the oppressed, and a glad certainty that the peasants would show by their moderation and self-restraint how worthy they were to be heard and heeded.

Unutterable consternation filled the upper classes far and wide; this sudden rising on so vast a scale, this lack of hands to till the ground, this loss of tithes and dues, together with the uncertain danger, shadowy and undefined, yet none the less real, which all at once threatened them, roused a wild and savage terror. Every peasant who fell into their hands was slain or horribly mutilated, castles and convents armed and fortified themselves with all the speed they could. Young Philip of Hesse was calling his men-at-arms together, and putting his borders into the best state of defence he could, before crossing into Thuringia to aid

his kinsfolk there; three other princes were preparing to join him; Markgraf Kasimir, and the terrible George Truchsess, with the army of the Swabian League, were taking the field—six experienced leaders against a horde of undisciplined and half-armed peasants!

But for the moment that horde was irresistible. To the old and countless grudges against their lords the insurgents added the strongest of all motives, for they fought not only for personal rights and liberty, but for religious freedom.

Although Luther fiercely denounced them, seeing but too well what obstacles and stumbling-blocks this insurrection would put in the way of the Reformation, and by his stern and uncompromising attitude did more to restrain them than could any prince or general, they set in the forefront of their demands the right to have reformed teachers, and the cessation of the rising persecution against them. Filled with enthusiasm, strong in the justice of their cause, the untrained peasant army, though opposed to all the might and chivalry of Germany, held its own, and swept over the country, waxing daily more numerous, more powerful, and more dangerous. Terms which would have amply satisfied the peasants at first were soon only thought of with derision, and ere long the avowed aim of the war was to divide all lands and goods among the peasantry, and to endure no superior except the Kaiser. The old hereditary reverence for the imperial dignity awed them even now, in the hour of unbridled triumph.

An unexpected strength was lent to their cause by the fear or sympathy of many towns, which opened their gates and entered into alliance with them, furnishing arms and provisions. Castles and convents were burned and pillaged; Würzburg was besieged, and the citizens made but a feint of defence, hoping to see the Bishop's fortress taken. All the great duchy of Franconia was overrun in a few weeks—Franconia, with its free towns, its two bishoprics, and the enormous estates of the Teutonic knights!

But, on the other hand, ill news began to come from

the Danube; the Truchsess had won two great battles there, and another was lost by the Bodensee, and the lords began to triumph; but, undaunted by reverses, new swarms of insurgents rushed forward to avenge the thousands slain. In an evil hour the young Count of Helfenstein cut the throats of some stray peasants whom he encountered going peaceably on their way, and thereupon the army of insurgents fell upon his castle and town of Weinsberg, and every knight and noble whom they took there was passed between their pikes, and fell pierced with countless wounds. It was an ancient mode of capital punishment which the peasants remembered for the benefit of von Helfenstein and his friends. Portents were seen; a bloody cross appeared in the sky, and half-crazed preachers went about with the army, lashing the peasantry up to fury. Münzer issued a proclamation, bidding them give the fire no time to go out, the sword no time to cool. From a march to demand justice, the rising had become a war of extermination.

Rumours of these things reached the Ilzthal, brought by beggars, or a wounded man creeping back, or by the very air, or a mocking fiend, so wild and uncertain and incredible did they seem. Magdalene's heart sickened and fainted in these days of suspense, and she could hardly find voice to reply to Rosilde's constant inquiries when Hildemund would come home, and why he was so long away. When and how, indeed, would her boy return, and in what wild and fearful scenes must he not be involved!

To his now scanty congregation Pfarrer Basil preached sermons full of indignation and sorrow, listened to with sullen displeasure. There was not one who dwelt in the valley except the bailiff of Burgstein whose heart was not with the rebels, and he fled in terror, expecting that a stern reckoning would be exacted of him for blows given, and old and feeble labourers ill-treated, and dues harshly exacted, for though the Freiherr had not himself been a severe master, he let his underling deal much as he would with the serfs and tenants. Once Pfarrer Basil came to seek

Magdalene, and learn if indeed Hildemund were gone with the Ilzthalers. She could only bend her head in mute assent, with a look of deep sadness.

'See, Frau, what has come of the lither life you have weakly let him choose!' exclaimed Pfarrer Basil; 'knowing no rein, the boy has followed his own wild will, and been thus fearfully misled! I fear me that Ulfric the leper is not altogether innocent in the matter either. He spoke strangely of these blind and sinful rebels when last I saw him. But you—were you not warned? Think you not now that you are answerable for this outcome?'

'It may be I have done ill,' she replied, sadly and humbly; 'yet I meant it rightly. I ever hoped that he would follow in the steps of his forefather, Berthold von Rohrbach, and be an evangeliser, and that even now, learning the country and the people, he was being trained thereto.'

'Was this, then, your thought?' said Pfarrer Basil, suddenly comprehending what had seemed so unaccountable in her conduct. 'The plan of a foolish woman, methinks, and of a heretic,' he added, severely. 'Where were his commission from his spiritual superiors? where his discipline and teaching? A wild project, in truth, and wildly has it turned out. Do you know what deeds are done by those with whom he has cast in his lot? Have you heard of Weinsberg, and of the insults heaped on the noble Countess of Helfenstein, and how, foremost in all, is that Kaspar who went hence after leading the people of these valleys to the sack of Burgstein?'

'Yes, I have heard somewhat thereof, reverend sir.'

'Tongue will not tell the foul deeds these madmen do,' he continued, in rising excitement, 'God-forgotten as they are—heretics and rebels against heavenly and earthly rule! But yet I will speak thereof, yes, at the altar itself. I will excommunicate everyone who does not at once return and make due submission!'

He had worked himself up into greater and greater anger as he spoke, and now, his hand outstretched, his eyes flashing, he seemed in act to hurl the threatened

curse upon those of whom he spoke. Magdalene rose up and faced him.

'No!' she said with force, 'that you of all men will not do. You, Herr Prediger, you who know so well what anguish the innocent feel to remember that their beloved died under the ban of the Church! You would do this!'

He turned on her as if she had struck him. 'Frau!' he exclaimed, in deep anger. Then his face changed, and he grew very pale; all the anger died out of his eyes.

'Alas!' he said, 'you are right. Who am I, a fellow sinner, to close the doors of heaven upon them? How should I judge their hearts? Yet see what wrack comes of rebellion against lawful authority.'

'True, reverend sir, and I could weep myself well-nigh blind for the bloody deed of Weinsberg, and that my son is among these misguided men, yet is it not strange that all Germany makes such ado over that one foul deed, yet none has cried out all these years at what the common man has suffered?'

It was so true that Pfarrer Basil could only marvel he had never seen it so before. Rosilde had been standing near. She came close now, and looked inquiringly in his face. 'You are not angry with Hildemund? He will come back soon,' she said.

'Heaven grant it, and spare you further sorrow, Frau,' he said.

'They are base churls to rebel against their lords,' said the child, hotly; 'if my father were here he would not have let them.'

Pfarrer Basil seemed glad to turn to a new subject. He asked Magdalene if she saw reason to fear molestation on Rosilde's account. Magdalene thought not. It had been reported that the little Fräulein had perished in the sack of Burgstein. Old Julchen's fears had magnified her encounter with Hildemund, whom she had not recognised in her alarm, to a history of a savage peasant, who had forced her to tell where the child was, and slain it with his knife. This rumour would probably

prove her safety, especially as time was passing, and the universal confusion prevented any search being made as to the truth of the story. Junker Wolfgang had hurried to join George Truchsess, with all the men remaining to him; Burgstein was in ruins, and he could not return there, whatever the event of the war. A woman who had come to Magdalene for advice and medicine had indeed seen the child, but hearing her call Frau Dahn 'Muhme,' observed, 'You have a little cousin with you now, Frau,' and took no further notice of her. It seemed safer to make no mystery of her presence, and neither hide nor show her. Rosilde listened attentively to all this, bending her little head now and then in sign of assent. She had received an ineffaceable impression from the time spent in Wolfgang's hands, and even now would wake sobbing from a dream that she had been recaptured. When Pfarrer Basil left the house she accompanied him for a few steps. He paused to look over the wide view, with much the same deep and silent pleasure that Petrarch felt when he gazed on the panorama which feasted his eyes as he stood on Mount Ventoux. Often and often he too reproached himself for his keen delight in the loveliness of nature, as if it were a snare to turn his soul from heavenly things, but the deep joy which it awoke in him could not be quenched. As he stood drinking it in, Rosilde uttered a little cry of pleasure. She had espied Ulfric coming towards them, and joyfully called his name. Herr Basil looked too, and a shudder of repulsion of which he was not master ran over him at the sight of the leper. He always reproached himself with even exaggerated bitterness for the feeling, and expiated it by hard and secret penance, but his first impulse would ever be to shrink from whatever was diseased or loathsome. 'As little children,' he said to himself, as he saw the innocent, unalloyed pleasure with which Rosilde greeted him, and heard the soft and tender tones in which Ulfric replied. Well might he dread lest those frank eyes should learn to turn away from him, and that joyful welcome become mere compassion, if nothing

colder. He might not touch the little hand, far less kiss the upraised face, but he might read its sweet welcome and know that here was one to whose eyes he was not an outcast; had no sign of divine displeasure upon him. Rosilde knew now that he was no angel, but a certain mysterious halo and fascination still surrounded him, and made a meeting with him a delightful event.

It was a new thing for Ulfric thus to leave his lonely retreat. Until now he had never willingly encountered any eyes but those of Magdalene and Hildemund, whose tender pity had stood between him and despair in the darkest period of his life. From all others he shrank, for no one could be so conscious of his condition as he; no one could loathe it so unutterably. But his link with the world was gone with Hildemund, and he must go forth if he would provide himself with food and fuel. He had come now to know whether Magdalene had heard any rumour of a great battle at Frankenhausen, where Münzer was reported to have gathered his forces. Pfarrer Basil was sure she knew nothing of this. She came out while they were speaking together, and both men were struck with the impress which the deep anxiety of the last two months had left upon her. Until now, amid all sorrow and care, she had an undivided mind. Now she was racked by sympathy for the peasants and grief at their cruelties; ceaseless fears for Hildemund, and a deep sense that this seizing of the sword could bring nothing but evil to all concerned.

'Has there then been a great battle? Know you the upshot of it?' she asked, with trembling lips.

'I fear it has gone ill with the peasants,' answered Ulfric, who, himself outcast and despised, passionately sympathised with 'the common man.' 'Karl, the smith, who has fled back hither, says that Münzer was like a raging demon, and preached on the battle-field, promising his troops a miracle to aid them, and they awaited the onslaught of the enemy, singing a hymn and gazing on a many-coloured ring around the sun, a

sign, as they deemed, of help from heaven, and raised no hand until they were mown down like grass before the scythe.'

'Was Hildemund there, think you?' Pfarrer Basil asked, looking at Magdalene. She shook her head, as Ulfric, too, looked at her, saying, 'I know not.'

'I know not neither,' she answered, pressing her hands together.

'And that pestilent fellow, this Münzer?'

'He is taken,' answered Ulfric, briefly; and Herr Basil understood that there was more behind which he would not speak before Magdalene and the child. The look on his face sufficiently told that the fate of Münzer was no tale for their ears.

'I must see this Karl,' said Pfarrer Basil. 'Brings he no news of any of the Ilzthalers?'

'Many are slain, but Kaspar and the miners are away to Würzburg; the bishop has fled, and the townsfolk are for the Bauer.'

Magdalene could only pray that her boy might be among those who were not at the fatal day of Frankenhausen.

That dark day was followed by another defeat in Elsass, where the peasants capitulated on terms, but were fallen upon by the merciless Antoine of Lorraine, and butchered in heaps. Over sixteen thousand fell there alone, yet still the war went on, and the land lay untilled, the cattle untended; all over the country castles and monasteries were still sacked and burned by infuriated serfs, whose villages were set on fire in return by their lords. The woods were full of robber bands, and of mutilated and wounded fugitives. The women and the old would have starved in the Ilzthal and many other places, had there been anyone to keep the streams and forests; but all rangers and bailiffs had fled, or were fighting under their lords, and with a certain sense of freedom and exultation everyone who could creep or crawl forth gathered fuel and laid snares for fish and game, and for the moment fared better than any among them had ever done before.

But the clouds gathered darker and more thickly each day. The early and amazing success of the peasants was followed by reverses as tremendous, but despair and fury sustained them for some months longer, though now the towns turned against them, fearful of pillage at their hands, or of sharing the punishment inflicted by Markgraf Kasimir on Rothenburg, which saw twenty of its principal citizens beheaded in the market-place, and lost all its rights as a free city. In Franconia alone the number of slain was computed at 10,000 peasants, yet others still crowded into the empty places, though they had struggled in vain, and knew it—knew it with a frenzy of despair which made death welcome.

Among those who could take no active part in the rising, but whose fate none the less depended on it, a deep dread began to replace the strange and terrible joy which had at first possessed all hearts. One day—perhaps very soon—the abbots and nobles would return, and there would be a reckoning for these last months. There was almost as much weeping over the few peasants who came back as over the many who came home no more. Few priests had dared to remain at their posts in this time of mortal peril, but Pfarrer Basil had stayed among his people, and none had molested him. They looked to him now as the only one who could stand between them and the vengeance of their lord, and he felt with deep thankfulness that he was beginning to be looked on as a friend by the flock which had regarded him with such obstinate suspicion. Now that evil had come upon them he preached no more of wrath and judgment, but spoke again of mercy and love, as he had done when first he came; and hungry hearts thrilled at his touch and hung on his words, though others, wrapped in sullen despair, would have none of his teaching.

Neither those who heeded nor those who turned a deaf ear guessed that in all the valley there was no soul more troubled than that of their priest. As far as he could see, his life had been a failure. His inclination had been to become a monk, but he had renounced it

for the humbler vocation of a parish priest, partly because it *was* the humbler, partly to give a home to a mother whose despair at the thought of losing him had gone to his heart. He had early been appointed to an important parish, for Basil von Below was no poor mass priest, of lowly birth, dependent on the offerings of his flock, and glad to be bidden to the table of some rich man who hoped by hospitality to an ecclesiastic to benefit by his prayers and to have spiritual advantage from his good works—'guter Werke theilhaftig zu werden'—as the phrase went. His rare gift of preaching soon brought the eyes of his superiors upon him, but his fervent impulsiveness could not but bring him into trouble, and while believing himself an orthodox son of the Church, which he ardently longed to see purified, he found himself accused of Lutheran heresies. His bishop, like a great many other high ecclesiastics, preferred the Church as she was, and with a remark, that if this voice would persist in crying it should at least cry in a wilderness, he sent his troublesome subordinate to the Ilzthal. It was a crushing blow. Pfarrer Basil had been listened to and loved as were few preachers or priests; his heart was full of his beloved flock, he rejoiced in knowing that their hearts were in his hand, and in his full and unceasing work he could keep the ever-gnawing grief of his life, the thought of his friend, that 'other half of his soul,' as he had said to Magdalene, at bay. His mother had died before this stroke, blessing her good son. At least she did not suffer from it. With that one consolation he came to the forest valley where his lot was henceforth cast, to face his life and work out his doubts as he could. If he hoped to find refuge from them in the books which Magdalene lent him he was greatly deceived. Again and again he locked them up, and for weeks never opened them, fasted and prayed, and did sharp penance; they drew him to them as with a magnet, and more and more their teaching crept into his mind and filled his thoughts. He looked like one driven by a spirit which racked and haunted him. Sometimes he could bear no human companionship;

at others only that of Ulfric the leper. Though he shrank from the man as a leper, he found a comfort and support in his companionship such as no one else could give. Ulfric, though younger than he, had struggled in waters as deep and stormy, wherein he, too, had all but gone down; nay, even now often felt them closing above his head; like Pfarrer Basil he had a deep and fervent sympathy for the oppressed and the troubled in heart; like him he had a keen sense of spiritual things, but where the priest's mind was all storm and confusion of thoughts which he dared not work out, Ulfric received all the teaching of his Church with absolute, childlike, unquestioning faith, incomprehensible to one who had it not, but most resting and comforting to the tossed and troubled mind of Pfarrer Basil, who sometimes would pay constant visits to the Ilzthal, and then again would be weeks before he reappeared. Ulfric's feelings towards him were a mixture of wonder, pity, sympathy, and a certain perplexity, with a growing love and tenderness such as Pfarrer Basil never failed to inspire in those who did not feel in opposition to him. There were such, and not a few; he was not a man who knew how to conciliate an opponent, though he could win devoted friends, to some of whom he seemed a very apostle; while to others he was no less dear, though they saw in him less a guide and leader than a man impulsive, fallible, influenced more than he knew by mixed motives, most human yet most lovable; one to whom a home and family were essential, and who was not the stronger but the weaker that neither in earth nor heaven had he any living or dead to call him husband or father. Scrupulously obedient to his spiritual superiors, he had accepted his sentence to its fullest extent, and kept up little or no communication with anyone beyond his parish. The life of a hermit could hardly have been more solitary.

The only member of his flock who could at all have entered into his feelings besides Ulfric was Magdalene Dahn, and with her he was always more or less in antagonism. She came to hear him preach, and drank

in strength and help from his teaching, but with the man himself she was not thoroughly in sympathy. Her strong and upright nature could not comprehend the doubts and self-tortures of one much more vehement and complicated than her own; as a woman, she could not realise the appalling position of a priest who found himself questioning the dogmas of the great Roman Church, with her weight of authority and her centuries of existence; and as the descendant of Berthold von Rohrbach Magdalene had inherited an independence of thought which made passive obedience, such as Ulfric accepted implicitly, and Father Basil strove passionately to attain, neither desirable nor practicable. But in these heavy days, when every rumour seemed gloomier than the last, and she knew not whether her one child was alive or dead, the ardent belief of Father Basil in prayer, and his intense personal love for his Lord, were inexpressibly precious to her, and she looked up to him with thankful gratitude, which yet did not prevent a certain instinct of combat and discussion when they met face to face in other circumstances.

She needed comfort sorely in the long absence of all news which followed the defeat at Frankenhausen. No fugitive came back; no beggar appeared at the Bannwart's house, no armed band passed through this lonely district. For all which was known of the war it might have been ended.

In point of fact it was ended, for Würzburg, seized by the peasants, had been retaken by the Swabian League, and no stronghold now remained in the hands of the insurgents. Whole districts were a wilderness; countless castles and monasteries lay in ashes; not a few towns had suffered severely, but they had no place on which to fall back, no fortress within whose walls they could make a stand or check the steady, ruthless advance of the army which was driving them before it. When the first mighty force of enthusiasm had been spent, the superiority of discipline and arms on the side of the knights and nobles became hopelessly apparent.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE first news that all was lost was brought by Hildemund himself. Late one evening, unobserved by the mother whose thoughts were, nevertheless, dwelling on him, he stood in the doorway of his home, gazing silently at the peaceful scene within, so far removed from everything which he had beheld in the wild tumult of the last six months that it seemed to him almost as if he saw it in a dream. The fire burned low on the wide hearth, but an occasional flickering gleam leaped up, and shone on the pewter plates and dishes on the shelves opposite, and the massive andirons on the hearth. The great black cauldron was simmering on its hook; a spinning wheel stood in one corner. Daylight was fast fading, and Magdalene sat by the window, to catch the last rays, busily embroidering a maniculare, as the silver ribbon was called which a priest wrapped round his hand at the Mass, a gift no doubt for Father Basil. Rosilde sat on a stool at her feet, working too, and singing while she worked, a mediæval carol, quaint and sweet as the childish voice trilled it forth. Hildemund knew it well; he had learned it himself as a child.

I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas Day in the morning.
And who was in those ships all three,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day ——

She broke off. 'It is not as pretty as the last song Ulfric taught Hildemund,' she said. 'Will you sing me that, Muhme? "Ach, wie herbe ist das Scheiden."'

'I cannot sing that,' said the mother, with a tremble in her voice.

'I wish Hildemund would come back and sing it again,' said Rosilde, with childish unconsciousness of how painful a chord she had struck. 'Do not you

think he will? Look, how the fire leaps up; and that means a guest is near.'

Magdalene lifted her eyes; they had grown heavy of late, and she was paler than of old. She saw her boy.

'Mother!' was all he could say for a while, and as for her the rush of joy left her speechless. But presently she put him a little way from her, and studied him with eyes full of love, which grew into wistful sadness the longer she looked at him. He had come home, but was this youth, worn with toil and travel, all the buoyant gladness gone from lip and eye, her Hildemund? Through what dark scenes had he passed to change him thus, even in the first moment of his return! He smiled faintly, as if conscious of her thoughts, and turning to Rosilde, who stood gazing at him with a fulness of content which could await the moment of greeting patiently, he kissed her hands and said, 'Ah, my sweet queen, I am not worthy to touch you; I have mingled in black doings since we two parted.'

'You shall not say so!' she cried, with sudden passion, and throwing her arms around his neck she bent down his head till his lips met hers. 'You are my knight now, for you saved me, you know.'

Tears filled his eyes. 'I will try to deserve so to be,' he answered in a low voice, and sat down, with a weary pleasure in being tended by Magdalene, while his eyes dwelt on Rosilde, whom he would not allow to wait on him, noting how she had grown, and how the haughty and imperious little Burgfräulein had become amenable to discipline, though, as he could very well see, the old spirit was there still, ready to flash out. She was not one of those children whose joy overflows into words. Hildemund's return was absolute content to her; she wanted nothing more than to see him sitting there, even if he did not speak. He had come back, and that was enough felicity.

Only very gradually did Magdalene learn what had befallen. Hardly even to her or Ulfric could Hildemund tell the tragedy of these months, or their crimes

and suffering, and the utter downfall of all the hopes with which he had left the Ilzthal.

'By sword, and flame, and halter, and pike all is ended,' he said. 'Of all who went from these valleys, not twenty will return—miner, serf, or free peasant, and Heaven have mercy on those who do!'

He spoke truly. By the time that the last effort at revolt was crushed, over a hundred thousand peasants had fallen, and serfdom settled down on Germany for two centuries and a half more.

'Deeds only fit for beasts and heathen have been done,' he said, presently; 'yes, I know it, but the peasants were maddened by cruelty and savagery worse than their own. Who set the example? Aye, they have been like wild beasts freed from cages, it is most true, and they encountered foes yet wilder and more cruel. Blame not them, blame rather the lords who scorned their cry for justice in the years past.

He had raised his head, and there was fire in his eyes now.

'Is that unhappy Kaspar yet alive?' Magdalene asked. 'It seems he mocked holy things by feigning to be a hermit, and so went and came unquestioned; but he can scarce have lived to see this downfall.'

She stopped, startled by Hildemund's look of shuddering horror.

'He is dead then?' she added, fearfully.

'You have not heard? None brought the tale?' He paused; and could only continue with a great effort in broken sentences. 'He was at Würzburg, and the citadel would have surrendered to us, but the townsfolk urged us to such hard terms that the garrison turned at bay, and held on until help came to them. A fatal delay! They fought gallantly, hurling stones and boiling pitch upon us, and taking right good aim; that was fair fighting, and one could go to it gladly. But we had not a leader among us, not one who knew aught of war, save Florian Geyer——'

'Geyer!'

'Aye, a cousin of our lord here, the one noble who

joined us willingly, for as for Götz of the Iron Hand, he was half-hearted all along, and so were others whom we forced to make terms with us.'

'But this Florian; wherefore did he renounce his friends and side with peasants?'

'None know; it may be he felt for our wrongs, but so fell was he, so pitiless to all nobles, that it would rather seem he had some private grudge against his peers. I cannot say. He would have made a noble leader, but all would lead and none obey, and Würzburg fell back into Bündisch hands, and in the assault Kaspar was taken.'

'And—then?'

'They chained him to a stake, and lit a slow fire, and so he died,' answered Hildemund, each word uttered between his teeth; 'and some fifty knights looked on and laughed loud, and praised him who devised this brave deed. Who think you it was? Why, Wolfgang of Lichtenberg. Said he, Kaspar had burned his Schloss, and now he had the burning of him, and it should last by clock just as long as that of Burgstein did.'

'My God! can knights and Christians do such deeds!' exclaimed Magdalene, sick and pale with horror.

'Aye, many such,' Hildemund answered gloomily.

'Wolfgang did *that*?' Rosilde asked, with wide open eyes, 'and the rest looked on and laughed?'

Hildemund signed assent.

'They are no knights and no Christians!' cried the child, glowing with indignation like a beautiful flame. 'If nobles do such deeds I will not be one of them! I will belong to you! I would rather be a serf than one of them who do such deeds—and laugh!'

'Had none any pity?' Magdalene asked at length.

'Aye—a soldier, who ran his pike through him, whereat the lords were sore chafed to have their sport spoiled.'

'And this Florian Geyer?'

'He died by the hand of his brother-in-law, who

came upon him in a lonely place, and bade him die there and so scape a halter.'

'That was well,' said the little Burgfräulein, with decision.

'Yes, it was well. Few fared so well,' said Hildemund, with the same gloomy bitterness with which he had before spoken. He leaned his head on his hand, and his mother had no courage to ask further.

She took Rosilde away to her bed, longing to have her boy to herself, but it was not soon that she could soothe her enough to leave her, so full was she of passionate indignation and horror both at the deed itself, and that one she knew should have wrought it, and belted knights have looked on and deemed it sport. She had assuredly not been brought up to tender feeling for the oppressed. Life in Burgstein had been rude enough, and the Freiherr's dealings with his people rough and high-handed, even when tempered by his jovial good humour. Blows were spared neither to man nor woman who fell under his displeasure, and many a man besides Kaspar had lost hand or eye for trifling faults, and there were black stories of deeds done when he was maddened by drink, which Rosilde happily knew nothing of. But whatever his faults, cold-blooded, deliberate love of cruelty was no sin of the Freiherr's, and Rosilde had inherited a temper which revolted from such deeds as she had this night heard of. She sobbed even when asleep, and murmured broken words, and once woke with a cry to Hildemund to save her from Wolfgang. Magdalene hushed her to sleep again, and at length could return to Hildemund, who sat just as she had left him, as if too wearied out in body and mind to stir. She sat down and waited for him to speak. By-and-bye he did so.

'One of the cloisters burned was Marienau,' he said abruptly.

'Marienau!'

'Aye. The prior was greatly hated, and his serfs flocked to meet us, and urged that the white wolves' lair should be destroyed, and the abbey prison broken

open, for one or another had father, or brother, or daughter there, and there were tales about the brotherhood which . . . well, it is a shame even to speak of them in your ears, sweet mother, but if they kept any of their vows, truly it was neither poverty nor chastity. But they made a stout defence; it was soon plain that the gates would not open for anything we could do, and some were for passing on, and losing no more time nor men, but all of a sudden smoke and flame rose up from within, and those who had been guarding the walls ran to quench the fire, and then it would seem some one opened the prison and let out the captives, so many that they overmastered those who yet held the gate, and let us in.'

'What hand had kindled the fire?'

'None rightly knows, but some said afterwards it was a girl who had been carried off, on pretext of some misdeed, to the convent, and thus avenged herself—I know not. But there was a *mêlée* in the court, and many fell on both sides, while the flames rushed up ever fiercer, and Prior Thomas and his monks were crazed with fear, and offered any ransom, so that their lives might be spared.'

'What befell?' asked Magdalene, fearfully.

'Oh, they were not harmed,' said Hildemund, with a tone of contempt; 'no harm came to the shaven polls. The time had not yet come when the peasants were mad with pillage and disappointment, and they did but sack the monastery, and empty the treasury and the cellars. But, mother, one died there whom I would have given my right hand to save, I think—the man who caused to make so brave a stand. You know whom I would say?'

'Not the good seneschal, oh, my son!'

He nodded gloomily. 'I never thought he was yet there until in crossing the court a fallen man in my way spoke my name. "Thou!" he said, and though I could do no other than I had done, it was like a dagger in my heart. Just that—no more but "Thou!"—but I shall hear it, I think, when I come to die.'

'That I well believe, my poor boy. Couldst thou do nought for the brave old man?'

'He was at the point of death, but as I raised him and laid his head on my breast he opened his eyes again, and spoke the name of Dornröschen. "Right her——" he said, and that was his last word.'

'She has lost a true friend, the poor child.'

'He left me that to do,' said Hildemund. 'I will not rest until the day comes when Rosilde von Burgstein has her own again.'

'A far off day, my boy.'

'It will come, mother,' he said, resolutely.

When Hildemund sought the inner room where he was accustomed to sleep, he looked round, asking himself whether it was months or years since he last was there. Nothing was altered in it, and yet all looked strange to him. Was it that he himself was so changed?

It was in this room that Magdalene kept her simple store of remedies—the dried herbs, hung in bundles from nails and pegs; the salves and drinks in glass bottles and earthenware jars, set on shelves; her lint and her bandages. Had Magdalene been a man, her title would have been that of Laborant, a name given to those who were apothecary and physician in one. Her simple skill sufficed for the needs of those days, when the healing art was little studied, and the main business of a leech was to heal wounds and bruises.

Here and there the antlers of a deer, shot by Kilian Dahn, projected from the wall; Hildemund hung up his cap and doublet upon one, and threw himself down on his bed, but sleep would not come. The wild scenes through which he had been passing rose up before him; cries and moans seemed to fill his ears, the shout of triumph and the curse of hate rang in them, mingled with calls for help and mercy, and he could have believed that the red light of flames glowed through his closed eyelids. The night was perfectly still and very dark; all round the house was unbroken silence. This in itself seemed to keep him awake and on the alert.

A shuddering horror possessed him more and more as he thought of the fate of Kaspar, and the scarcely less horrible end of other leaders in the rebellion who had fallen into the hands of the nobles, and his mind was full of questionings as to his own future, and fears lest his share in the revolt should involve his mother. Despondency overwhelmed him as he felt that there was small hope but that something would be known of his share in the attack on Burgstein, or at least that he had joined the peasant army, and though he was free, and owned house and land, that would make against rather than for him. He tossed restlessly, until the door softly opened, and Magdalene, who had sat in the next room lost in thought over past and future, amid which the sweet and mournful air which Ulfric had taught to Hildemund, 'O wie herbe ist das Scheiden,' strangely mingled, came in. She held a lamp, which she shaded with her long, slender fingers as she stood gazing at her boy with one of those looks of which some mothers have the secret. He had closed his eyes, but now opened them and met hers. How fair she was, he thought, how brave and tender and noble!

'Mother,' he exclaimed passionately, as she bent over him, 'if you should suffer for what I have done!'

'Think not of that, my son; I can only suffer much through you. It is of your danger we must think. Melchior, who was here to-day for salve for his wounds, says it is rumoured that the bailiff of Burgstein has returned, and though Lucas, the Geyer bailiff, be kind and merciful, compared to him of Burgstein, between them there will be a stern reckoning. My boy, you cannot tarry here.'

'I know it,' he said, raising himself on his elbow, and looking round wistfully; 'and if I could, nevermore could I take up the old life after these last months. But you, mother—and Dornröschen?'

'If need be, we can go to Ulm, to mine uncle, Philip Welser, who lives there with his son-in-law, my cousin, Jacob Paumgärtner, who married his one daughter, once my little playmate.'

'Not to Nüremberg?'

'No. Dornröschen needs must pass as a Dahn, and would find cold welcome there, and in my mother's eyes I am yet but a girl, though I have such a tall son,' said Magdalene, smiling, 'and she would exact an obedience which I could not render, yet might hardly deny without breach of duty. She would fain blot out the name of Dahn.'

'I understand,' said the boy, flushing hotly. 'Doubtless the proud Paumgärtners were sorely humbled when one of their kin wedded a man without name or station.'

'They were,' answered Magdalene, calmly. 'The *Geschlechter*[1] of Nüremberg hold themselves well-nigh the equals of any nobles in Germany, and unworldly as my father was, he could ill have brooked my marriage, but that while Kilian lay sick in our house he won his heart, and when Graf Geyer urged his suit, or rather commanded me to wed him, my father could give me ungrudgingly.'

'But not my grandmother?'

Magdalene paused, and shadows of past pain crossed her face.

'How should she?' she said at last, 'she looked on things far otherwise than my father; to her his carelessness of pomp or success, or the world's good word, seemed poor-spirited and scornworthy, and until our town was taken, and life, goods, honour at the mercy of our victors, she had held her head higher than any among its dames. My father, too, held high place in the council; all men knew his uprightness and esteemed his opinion. Sore humiliation it was to be helpless before a haughty conqueror, and owe the sparing of our goods to his protection, given because his banner-bearer had been borne wounded within our doors.'

'But you, mother—you at least?——'

'I had prayed with all my soul to be delivered from a marriage which my mother had planned for me, yet when deliverance came thus I shrank and feared,

[1] Patrician burgher families.

though while I tended Kilian I had seen somewhat of how true and loyal a heart was his. Ah, he loved me with a great love, my Kilian! You will never know, my son, what you lost in losing your father. Sometimes it seems as if we had been parted for a lifetime, sometimes but a day; and yet I think we are never far apart. He comes to me, not when I will, but often when I least expect it I know he is with me. But you —alas! you can scarce remember him!'

She spoke with deep regret.

'I miss no one since I have you!' Hildemund exclaimed.

'Alas! what can I do in this strait? I see no light, no leading. I had a great hope, but that I have laid down; you are not called to follow in the steps of Berthold von Rohrbach. Where will you go, my boy? To Ulm?'

'Will you too go thither?'

'Nay, not yet. I am greatly needed here; there is an evil time coming on the valley, and all I can do with medicine and money will be too little. And Ulfric—I would not leave the poor leper desolate; he has missed you grievously, though Herr Basil has shown him kindness.'

'I must see him ere I go. Mother, I shall seek the Duke of Würtemberg.'

'It would seem you love falling causes,' she answered, with a faint smile; 'but men speak much ill of this Duke—the slayer of von Hutten!'

'Much that is false!' exclaimed Hildemund; 'his friends are few and his foes many, and they fight against him not only with sword but with pen, and tongues blacker than their ink!'

'Think you he will welcome one who has shared in the rebellion?'

'Nay, have you not heard how he appealed to the peasants, telling them he was a poor banished man, and that if they would have him as a brother, he would stand by them for life and death? Yes, and when George Truchsess called the Würtembergers to fight

against him, they answered that Würtemberg spears knew not how to pierce Ulrich! And he would have recovered his duchy had not those hounds of Swiss failed him once more. Scarce could he get back to Hohentwiel with the Bauern-Georg upon his heels!'

Magdalene had learned from returned fugitives that this was the nickname given to the butcher of the peasants, George Truchsess.

'Now Archduke Ferdinand has filled Würtemberg with his soldiers, and set the Truchsess over the land,' Hildemund continued. 'But one day the Duke will have his own again—he is a noble lord to strike for—and when he is again in Würtemberg, he will do justice to Dornröschen.'

'Ah!' said Magdalene, comprehending, and she sighed. This then was the work to which Hildemund would devote himself—this, not that to which she had silently dedicated him from childhood, and, as she had fondly hoped, trained him, when she had told him, even in his boyhood, tales of Berthold von Rohrbach and his holy brotherhood, and seen his eyes glow and kindle as he listened. She had thought that the scenes through which he had been going would have deepened the desire to comfort and uphold the oppressed and sad, but it was not so. The boy had as it were manhood thrust suddenly on him, before he was ready—he had lost his old self, and yet did not know what to do with the stormy chaos of feelings, desires, possibilities, which he found within him. Magdalene understood enough of his state to know that she must trust him to higher guidance than her own, and so leave him. But her heart was very sore as she owned it. The sympathy between mother and son, however, was too deep for Hildemund not to know much of how she felt, and he drew her hand to his cheek, and said, 'Mother, I would not disappoint you, could I do otherwise. But it seems to me as if all my heart was on fire—as if I must be astir and never rest until I had mastered myself—I do not know myself, mother!'

'I understand, my boy.'

'To-morrow I will seek the Pfarrer,' he went on. 'How has he taken all that has befallen?'

'At first with hot displeasure, the hotter that he found the people had read his teaching of brotherly love and the rights of a free man in Christ their own way, so that they held him as upholding the rebellion, and he spoke and preached hard words and pitiless; but the sight of Jobst and Melchior, returning brand-marked and with nose and ears slit, and sore wounded besides, changed his tone. He is one ever borne away by feeling; a matter will never lie four-square to him—one side or more will always be unequal. He too loves falling causes,' she added, smiling a little.

'I heard somewhat of him when I was at Würzburg. It seems he is of a good family, who early got him high place among the parish clergy, but he never lived a worldly life like the most of these, and they were ill-pleased thereat, since his ways were a rebuke to them, especially to Bishop Conrad—a silly old man, who loves wine and ladies and rich feeding. But the poor and the townsfolk flocked to his church—he always preached there, and would have no vicarius, like others; so by-and-bye there was a cry of heresy raised, specially by the Dominicans, who were jealous of him, and he was exiled. The people would have forced Bishop Conrad to keep him, but he came away secretly, out of obedience. But he is no Lutheran, sure?'

'It may be he teaches like Luther without knowing it.'

'The Bishop would never think of him again, but there are those at his elbow to egg him on, and it is said that all he does here is noted and known at Würzburg. Will you not tell him, mother?'

'Doubtless he knows it, and would but speak the more plainly for it.'

'And poor Ulfric?' Hildemund asked, after a moment. 'Have you seen him of late? His heart went with us, and his Twelve Articles were our war-cry. Ah, had the peasants but been content with them, or had he but been like others, so that he could have

led us! How he tasted of bitterness that he could have no part with us! But no—the army would not endure discipline from any—Florian Geyer learned that.'

'How should men who have known but slavery learn to bear liberty, unless through a forty years' trial in the wilderness?'

'The few who had foresight—the burghers and others who joined us—could get no hearing, and so all was lost, and I shall never see our peasants free,' Hildemund said with a groan. 'No, not I, nor any living. But *one* wrong shall be set right, if I give my life for it.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was with a feeling that all which he had to do in the Ilzthal must be done quickly, that Hildemund made his way to the village to seek for Herr Basil. Dornröschen was with him, for she had gathered that he would soon leave her, and would not let him go out of her sight. So many violent changes had befallen her in the last months that an unspoken terror had haunted her lest something fresh should occur and tear her from the only people she had to love, and fling her back into the hands of Wolfgang and old Julchen. With childish reserve she kept silence on her fears; but she would never be left alone, and showed herself as little as possible when Magdalene's patients came to the house. With Hildemund she had an unreasoning sense of safety; her fears were lulled by his presence. Magdalene herself was going to a distant hut where fever had broken out, and gladly let her accompany him, the more that the belief that the little Burgfräulein had perished, and that Frau Dahn had a niece living with her, was entirely accepted in the valley, and no one was likely to identify her.

Hildemund had much on his mind which he meant to tell Herr Basil that was no tale for Rosilde's ears. The wild story of all these months, and this rapid passage

from a blithe, contented boyhood to half-comprehended manhood, in which he felt as if he had lost all his bearings, could be told to none but a confessor, or to a trusty friend like Ulfric, who seemed to Hildemund, in his brave submission, his keen and generous sympathy for the oppressed, nobler than many a canonised saint. But Dornröschen could be left with the priest's old deaf housekeeper, while Hildemund spoke with her master after mass, which he looked forward to serving as he had sometimes formerly done. The thought of thus approaching the altar in the well-known church was full of refreshment and soothing to him, and he began to feel as if the last half year were almost a dream, and far behind him, when he went along the moist forest paths, with Dornröschen holding his hand, and looking with satisfied eyes into his face. She did not say much; she was a silent child for the most part, contented with the presence of those dear to her, and she had learned to love Hildemund with a fervour such as no one else had called forth. Even when scarcely beyond babyhood she had looked for his coming to the castle, and regarded him as her especial property. Her father she had been fond of; for her mother she had never cared at all. Bärbele she had ruled over, and liked in a domineering way; but Walther the seneschal she had loved, and next to him, Hildemund, who played with her, told her stories, let her ride on Hundolf while he held her,—who was always gentle and courteous to her, and though tall and strong, never used his strength unjustly. Now Walther had gone away, and Hildemund had no rival. Each day of his absence she had missed him more, and even Magdalene had hardly wearied so much for his return. He was her knight, her champion and deliverer, in whose eyes, as she somehow very well knew, she could do no wrong. All her strong, childish romance gathered round Hildemund.

They were in time for mass, but a shock of disappointment awaited Hildemund when he advanced with his request.

'Are you worthy of this, my son?' Herr Basil said,

looking at him with questioning eyes. 'Are hands and heart so clean that you dare meddle with holy things before confession and absolution?'

From the sternness of his tone no one could have guessed how rejoiced he was at the sight of the truant, returned in safety. The severity was born of gladness, but Hildemund could not know that.

'So be it, then, honoured sir,' he answered, all the quiet content which had come into his eyes in the forest going out of them. Dornröschen gave a fiery look at Herr Basil, and slipped her hand into that of Hildemund. He knew she meant that whoever might blame or rebuke him, she was on his side.

They knelt together—the sole worshippers present. Pfarrer Basil approached after Mass, and was about to bid Rosilde seek his old housekeeper, when the little acolyte who had taken the place which Hildemund had longed to fill, came running back aghast, and a wild clamour of shouts and wailing, threats and cries arose without.

'Stay here! I command it,' said the priest, grasping Hildemund as he started forward. 'What is it, Dami?'

'Alack, reverend sir, there are men-at-arms on the green, and I saw the bailiff of Burgstein, and the villagers are all there, and—— only hearken!' and, pale with affright, he escaped out of the church.

'If the bailiff be there with soldiers, it is to take vengeance on the village,' said Hildemund, full of wrath and alarm. 'Yet what can the people suffer more?'

'I must forth and stand between these unhappy ones and further ill,' said Herr Basil. 'Show not yourself if you value your safety or that of this child.'

He hurried out, and Dornröschen looked up fearfully into the pale, set face of her companion.

'What will they do?' she asked, as the tumult suddenly ceased, and then a shrill cry of women's voices rose up, wild with despair and anguish, and at the same moment a sudden light glowed on the windows of the building. In spite of prohibition and danger, Hildemund sprang to the door and looked out. The green was

covered with men, women, and children, huddled together, and surrounded by men-at-arms with levelled pikes, and the village was in flames from end to end. This was the punishment meted out to the Ilzthal. Wolfgang had kept his word.

'My God!' was all that Hildemund could say.

They perceived Herr Basil pleading vehemently with the bailiff and the leader of the band, regardless of rough answer and even menace, and saw him point now to the helpless throng, now to the burning houses, where were all the goods they possessed, and the destruction of which left them without shelter in the coming winter. The flames lighted up the blank, despairing faces of the villagers, and turned the stream red as it flowed below, sending up hissing, sputtering jets of water as burning brands and beams crashed and fell into its bed. In an incredibly short time the wooden houses were only a heap of ashes. 'Remember Burgstein!' shouted the bailiff. 'Now, Balthasar, make an end of the work.'

A fresh wail and shriek arose from the women as the soldiers seized on some half-dozen men pointed out by the bailiff and bound their hands. They made no resistance, only turning looks of miserable appeal to Herr Basil.

'Hold!' he cried, his voice ringing like a trumpet; 'as you would yourselves find mercy hereafter, give them time to confess and be shriven. Stand back, I command you.'

'Two minutes each while we knot the halters,' answered the leader of the soldiers sullenly, with a doubtful look at the bailiff, and the men-at-arms drew back, and allowed the priest to approach.

'What—what are they going to do?' Rosilde whispered in terror.

'Do not ask,' said Hildemund, in an agony of impotent grief and horror. 'Come away; come back into the church. This is the work of Wolfgang von Lichtenberg!'

There was a dead silence now, ominous and heart-broken; then came the tramp of many footsteps toward

a group of old trees whose branches stretched over the green; then a shout of brutal triumph, overpowering the sound of weeping. Herr Basil came into the church, not crushed and overwhelmed, as Hildemund, who had started up to meet him, had expected; pale as marble, indeed, but erect, strung with intense feeling, his dark eyes ablaze. He did not even seem to see the two who awaited him.

'Lord of justice, hear the poor when he crieth and there is no helper!' he exclaimed, standing before the altar, and stretching out his hand. 'Suffer not the cruel to ride over their necks! Shall such iniquity be wrought and Thou not avenge, O God Almighty?' And then, seeing Hildemund, 'One victim at least I can save; none know you are here. Get to my house while none have time or thought for you, and at nightfall get you hence to the first refuge we can devise.'

He spoke with feverish energy. Hildemund felt Rosilde's fingers close suddenly on his; she looked from one to the other, her eyes searching their faces.

'Reverend sir,' Hildemund said, pressing her closer to him, 'how could I leave my mother and Dornröschen here while such deeds are wrought?'

'Your presence would be fatal to them; you hence, what pretext could any have for harming them?'

'Pretext!' exclaimed Hildemund, with keen bitterness.

'I know—I know they would need none. But Frau Magdalene—so beloved, such a fountain of help to all around—she at least must be safe!'

He spoke with vehemence, meant rather to convince himself than his hearers.

'None are safe!' answered Hildemund. 'What have those now wailing without this church done? those children, and women, and old folks?'

'Let me go and tell the bailiff he shall be hung to the highest tree in the Thuringian forest if he dare to harm Frau Magdalene!' burst in Rosilde.

'Hush, hush, child, you are no Burgfräulein now,' said Pfarrer Basil, impatiently. 'Listen to reason,

Hildemund. What could your mother wish so much as to know you safe? You are no serf, I know, and on Geyer lands, but if any word gets abroad as to Burgstein all is lost, and even as it is perchance the bailiff of Geyer may treat you as a rebel. Is there none who at need can speak a word for your mother?'

'The Geyer'schen bailiff's wife sent for Muhme while you were away, because she was sick, and we went to her and cured her,' said Rosilde.

'Ah, is it so? That should count now. Get to my house, Hildemund, I tell you. I will see this little one under your mother's care, and seek the bailiff's wife as soon as may be, so that she may speak for Dame Magdalene if evil come.'

But Hildemund was unpersuadable. To flee and leave his mother's fate uncertain he could not bring himself to do.

'She must go to Ulm,' he said. 'Then, she gone, I will seek Duke Ulrich. But until then I cannot and will not go.'

'And meanwhile, headstrong boy?'

'I can hide in the Eschthal—I could not go hence without seeing Ulfric. The nights are not yet so cold that it is a hardship to sleep out of doors.'

'At least remain under my roof until nightfall. Now, my child, come.'

'Hildemund—I shall see Hildemund again?' asked Rosilde, with a quivering lip.

'Yes, yes, if all go well.'

'Yes, my sweet one,' said Hildemund, kissing her tearful eyes, 'and while I am gone be good in my place to my mother.'

'I will,' said the child, gravely, and crossing herself as she spoke, as if registering a vow. Herr Basil hurried her away.

'By the side door, Hildemund, to my house. It is empty—my poor old housekeeper is with her daughter.' He shuddered, and a look of great exhaustion came over him, as if the strength left by intense excitement were leaving him, but he roused himself with an effort. 'I

must speak a word, ere I go, to my people,' he said. 'Although no burial be granted to these poor sufferers for crimes they scarce understood, come what may of it I will read some of those holy words which the Church gives her departed. Await me but a few moments while I tell those mourners this.'

Hildemund sat down and drew Dornröschen to him, clasping her fast and close in silence. He had no heart to speak. She laid her head on his breast, and so they sat until Herr Basil returned. 'Come!' he said, with the same look and tone of one lifted out of himself and beyond all ordinary conditions. 'I must hasten back—that consolation at least shall be theirs. The cruelty of man may do its worst, but the Church shall not fail them. Come!'

Magdalene was not unprepared for the grim tale. Rumours had been brought to the hut where she had carried her ministrations, which sent her home full of dread, but Pfarrer Basil found her almost as unpersuadable as Hildemund. To think of her own safety at a time when such a flood of misery had broken loose over her poor neighbours was intolerable to her, at least until her safety was unmistakably threatened, but she laid her earnest commands on Hildemund to seek Hohentwiel at once. They met in the night near the leper's cave; Hildemund might not enter it, but Ulfric's neighbourhood was no small comfort to him. To Ulfric he could pour out all which he had purposed to tell Basil, and more yet, for Ulfric had stimulated and shared his plans and hopes, and viewed the issue of the struggle with grief far beyond Hildemund's. His thoughts and plans, passed on by Hildemund to Kaspar, and by him to other leaders, had, though Ulfric did not know it at the time, shaped all the earlier schemes of the peasants in Thuringia, and if he escaped in the day of vengeance he would owe it to the humiliation of being a leper, on whom none wasted a suspicion.

In the dim twilight they spoke long together, heart to heart, these two, the boy and the leper, whose friendship had been so strangely close, and who might

scarce hope to meet again. The one hoped to make himself a name and right a great wrong, and if the Duke never regained Würtemberg, other possibilities lay in the future; but, for the other, life was closing in more and more, although he could not hope to die, for he was full of vigour and ardent impulses, torturing him in this existence void of hope or any future, yet always lengthening out, only varied by paroxysms of despair and pain so keen that they seemed almost as much bodily as mental. And now Hildemund was going away, and Magdalene would be driven away too, and the child who had brightened some desolate hours for him—all would go. Only to him never any change came, except for the worse. Ulfric fought out that conflict as he had done many others, in his own breast, in silence. Only he said, 'My songs will reach no further than the Eschthal now, Hildemund.' And Hildemund knew what it was to him to lose that link with the world, to be deprived of the deep joy—the one joy which the leper had known since the curse fell on him—of learning that his sweet gift had consoled the sorrowful and heightened the joy of the glad.

At midnight Magdalene came to the Eschthal. She could not leave Dornröschen in her empty house, and brought her too. There was much to say, much to debate, for means of communication would be well-nigh impossible; in places far more on the beaten track than these valleys letters came and went very rarely, delivered by private hand or through some favourable opportunity, and in the disorganised state of the country such would be more rare than ever. Most unlikely was it that Hildemund would be able to send word whether he reached Hohentwiel, or what reception he met with there, and it would be a long and tedious matter to send a despatch to Ulm, warning the kinsfolk there that Magdalene might need the shelter of their roof. Hildemund would hear of nothing touching himself until she had promised to do this, and to hold herself ready for speedy departure in case of need. Money she did not lack. The fortune inherited from her father was ample

for wants far greater than hers and those of her poor neighbours; and she brought Hildemund a purse and a doublet in which were stitched broad pieces enough to last him for many a day. Many words, 'which never were the last,' were spoken before that final parting, when all the formal respect of the day, observed even between the nearest and dearest, broke down, and Magdalene could hardly give the blessing which Hildemund knelt to ask, for weeping. Rosilde stood by, quite silent; Ulfric chancing to look at her, was struck with surprise and pity by the unchildlike depth of pain on her face, and the equally unchildlike self-control, but he could not, as another might, soothe her by touch or caress, and he was afraid to trust his voice. A rustle and movement in the wood overhead made them all start, and then draw a deep breath of relief as they recognised Herr Basil, wan and weary with the terrible strain of that day, but making his way down the steep cliff path to bless and bid Hildemund farewell. A great rush of gratitude filled Magdalene's heart at the sight of him.

'Ah, dear sir, this is good of you!' she murmured, and the loving and thankful glances from all the eyes turned to him were balm to his heart.

'Let us pray together,' he said, and in the lonely valley, under the cold clear skylight they knelt and prayed, and the full hearts were lightened and strengthened by the words which flowed from the very soul of the priest whose voice was speaking for them all. But none were so moved and stirred as Ulfric. None else thought of it in that supreme moment, but to him this making one among worshippers for the first time since he had been dead among the living and cut off from holy ordinances—this joining as one of a Christian congregation, and not merely on bare, far-off sufferance, was wonderfully sweet and strange. A thrill ran through him of half-formed hope, that a miracle might be wrought on his behalf, though he knew all the time that no leper was ever healed, none had ever, since days of visible Divine interposition, come back to claim his place again, any more than a ghost from the grave.

Yet he could not feel again quite the same numbing despair as before.

The prayer ended with words of absolution and peace. Rising, the priest said, 'Now let us part, dear friends, and pray ever for one another, so that when the Angel gathers the supplications lying on the heavenly altar ours may be offered up together. Delay not,' dear son,' he added to Hildemund, 'for it is said that to-morrow the bailiff of Burgstein will search these woods with dogs to discover any fugitives who lurk there. God help them, for man has no pity!' he added with shuddering emotion, reflected in the faces of his hearers.

'My mother, Herr Pfarrer—she likes ill to leave the valley,' said Hildemund.

'I think she has no need; that much good news at least I have to tell you. I have seen the Scheurlin'—it was thus that the wife of Jacob Scheurl, the Geyer bailiff was called—'and she was forward to declare that none—least of all her husband—would harm Frau Magdalene. But she said plainly that thou, my son, wert best away.'

'Dear sir! how I thank you!' said Hildemund, and then, turning to Rosilde, he said fast and low as he kissed both her little cold hands, 'Farewell, my sweet; one day you shall again be a Burgfräulein.'

'No, not that, I do not want that—only come back,' she answered, looking up with such a wistful though tearless gaze that his lips quivered, and he turned hastily away with 'My mother . . . . remember.'

'Yes;' and passing to Magdalene's side she took her hand. The poor mother had other things to think of than Rosilde, yet the soft touch comforted her a little. And thus, with more of hope and comfort than they could have thought possible, the last farewells were spoken, and Hildemund went on his way.

CHAPTER XIX.

HILDEMUND'S journey by night was through the forest, where the shadows gathered more and more thickly, and a shiver came over the trees as the wind began to rise. Now and then a jay screamed suddenly, but mostly all was still except for the rustle and sway of the boughs and the sound of running water. By noon he was far on his way to the fortress which Duke Ulrich had secured just when his enemies believed he had not a stronghold left. To that lofty and impregnable eyrie he had retreated when the defeat of the peasants' cause once more destroyed his hopes. As Hildemund had said, Würtemberg lay more helplessly than ever in the grasp of Archduke Ferdinand, to whom his brother, Charles V., had made it over. Once more the banished Duke had to abide his time, with the small knot of faithful friends who shared his fortunes.

Hildemund's journey was through a hundred dangers, for peasants, maddened with despair, were lurking in the forest, ready to fall on any one whom they could plunder, and even if the password of the Bundschuh might defend him from these, there were swarms of vagabonds and robbers who, even a dozen years later, made travelling still unsafe. It was fortunate for him that he espied in the course of the day a party of merchants, going with a strong escort, who willingly allowed him to join them when he explained that he was carrying letters to the abbot of Gscheidt, from the Pfarrer of his own valley. The addition of this tall, fair-faced lad, well dressed and well armed, and of courteous bearing, was very welcome; they lent him a spare horse, and he journeyed with them, choking back as best he could his feelings when the war formed, as it constantly did, the sole subject of conversation, regarded of course with all the narrowness, pitilessness, and triumph in the issue which those would feel whose trade had been arrested, whose city had been pillaged, and

who had seen those whom they utterly despised suddenly raised into masters and foes. The country through which they travelled bore ghastly traces of cruelties exercised on both sides—ruined cloisters, more than one castle destroyed by fire, towns with breaches in their walls and shattered gates, which workmen were hastily repairing; lands neglected and uncultivated. Here and there burning huts showed that the punishment of Burgstein was no extraordinary one. In other years at this season the harvests would just have been gathered in, cattle would have fed in the meadows, and the air would have been musical with the sound of their bells and call of herdsmen. But now the silence was unbroken. In many a village the doors were open, the houses empty, the churches deserted, the bells silent in their towers, the garlands on the graves withered. Now and then a dog ran out and barked, scanning the passers-by vainly and wistfully, and, seeing they were strangers, dropped back, with drooping ears and tail. Once they passed a spot where not long before some deadly struggle had taken place, for mailed men lay thickly on the ground, mingled with peasants whose dead hands still grasped bill-hooks, scythes, and flails, as they lay with a strange lock of mortal hate on their pale faces. The ravens flapped heavily up as the merchant-party rode hastily by, forcing their frightened horses to pass the corpses and the dead steeds lying among them. The very face of the land was a book written all over with a tale of lamentation and mourning and woe. There were not wanting signs that the old rule had begun again, for in some places peasants were toiling, watched by a bailiff with a strong whip or heavy staff, laid plentifully about the shoulders of the weak or unwilling labourer, whether man or woman; and there were a great many women at work, impressed, doubtless, to replace husbands or sons, absent, or perhaps lying dead somewhere, with both hands severed from the wrists, or too cruelly mutilated to work again if life remained in them. Many and many a tree bore the like ghastly fruit to those on the Burgstein green.

Hildemund had to set his teeth and ride as far apart from his companions as he dared, struggling with the grief and indignation within him, and ever asking himself how his mother was faring, and Dornröschen, until he could hardly restrain himself from retracing his steps at all hazards. He was glad to part from the merchants at Gscheidt, and seek Pfarrer Basil's friend, who received him hospitably. A day or two later he saw the strong walls of Hohentwiel rise far overhead, and knew that he was beyond the reach of immediate danger.

But before Herr Basil learned from his friend that Hildemund had prospered, Magdalene was far from the Ilzthal. A few days after Hildemund's departure the wife of the Geyer bailiff appeared at the presbytery, the only house left standing in Burgstein, with a basket of eggs and apples for the priest, offerings such as any of his flock who had them to give were bound to present. He had been ceaselessly occupied in trying to house and provide for the homeless, heartbroken villagers. As many as his own small dwelling could contain were there, the oldest, feeblest, and the sick; others he had bestowed in the church, but until the bailiff would give leave for wood to be used, nothing could be reconstructed. Not a bough might be cut without permission, nor wood taken to replace the tools burned, and had not Herr Basil and Magdalene both contributed largely from their private means, and sent to a distance for food, famine would have been added to all other misfortunes. 'Die Scheurlin' looked pitifully around her.

'This is a welcome gift,' said Herr Basil. 'We need all, and more than all, which kind souls can bring us.'

She glanced about; there was no possibility of a word in private.

'You are most welcome, honoured sir,' she said, 'and I would it were better worth your acceptance. And touching that package which you wished to send by my brother, if it can be ready by the morn we have a messenger at your service.'

She glanced up, and their eyes met.

'Is there such haste?' he asked, with as much indifference as he could assume.

'Yes, sir, we are sending to ask orders how to deal with the serfs on the Geyer'sche lands, but 'tis like my lord will leave it to Jacob, for he puts much trust in him,' she said, with wifely pride.

'God grant it, for he will be merciful, I know.'

'Graf Lichtenberg came yesterday, but he brought no commands,' she added.

'So!' said Herr Basil.

'Yes, and Kunz with him. It seems he is greatly troubled about the little Burgfräulein, who is said'—she made a brief, significant pause—'to have perished in the sack of Burgstein, and he would learn all he can thereof.'

'Ah! saith he so?'

'Nay, sir, the Graf is not one to speak to us of such matters; but Kunz will at times babble in his cups, and he let fall somewhat yesternight while drinking with my husband.'

Herr Basil stood thinking. 'All say the child is dead,' he said; 'wherefore should the Graf doubt it?'

'Belike he would but be sure of the thing.'

'There be none who can tell him one way or the other.'

'The Graf is as keen as a lime-dog on the trail; he is a fearful man to deal with,' she answered, turning pale. 'And now about the package, reverend sir.'

He understood her very well. She owed her life to Magdalene's care, and now was putting means of flight within her reach.

'I am sore pressed for time, as you see. But it may be Frau Dahn would profit by this occasion if you could go so far out of your way as to tell her thereof.'

'I—I—my husband will think I tarry long,' she said, embarrassed, and he perceived that though the bailiff might favour Magdalene's flight, he did not wish to be involved in any danger. Her face suddenly changed, and she shrank within the church, and busied herself in dividing a cake which she took from her

pocket between two little half-starved children. Herr Basil instantly saw the cause of her change of countenance: Graf von Lichtenberg was riding into the village, and looking round with an unmoved yet displeased glance over the burned houses. Seeing the priest in the doorway of the church he rode up and saluted him courteously. He was well aware that even in exile and disgrace this was not a man to be despised. Never apt at concealing his feelings, it was with the utmost difficulty that Basil could suppress his aversion to this murderer, whose guilt he knew by a channel which sealed his lips. He stood pale, impatient, visibly eager to have done with whatever was to pass between them.

'Were it not well,' began the Graf, casting a glance past him into the church, which seemed to take in every one huddled there, 'that these poor wretches rather rebuilt their dwellings than herded here like sheep?'

'Awaiting their butcher,' was on the priest's lips, but he suppressed it, feeling the necessity of being conciliatory for his people's sake.

'Assuredly, if they have leave so to do, and may furnish themselves with materials,' he said.

'It shall be seen to; the land has lain already over half a year untilled,' said the Graf, and Herr Basil perceived that he was, unlike most of his degree, too far-sighted to prefer vengeance to self-interest.

'The village was burned unknown to him—Wolfgang's hand was in that deed,' was the conclusion the priest came to. 'The worst for my people is over.'

As if responding to his thoughts, which were, indeed, plainly enough to be read in his face, the Graf continued, 'What is done is done; we have now to reconstruct. As you may think, it has been impossible to come hither since I left Italy, but at the first moment I have hastened to learn what indeed was the fate of my ward and cousin, Rosilde von Burgstein. I would fain believe she escaped in that evil hour when the castle was sacked?'

A faint and dubious smile curved Herr Basil's lips.

'My son, and Kunz my man, tell me she was in charge of a woman belonging to the household—Julchen, I think they called her. Is she here?'

'She is,' said the priest, briefly, and pointed to an old crone, sitting just within the doorway, her hands locked round her knees, as she sat rocking herself and muttering ceaselessly.

'That hag!' exclaimed the Graf, startled out of his smooth and polished tone.

'Just so, Herr Graf. Such wits as terror left her after the burning of the castle, quitted her altogether when your bailiff hung her son before her eyes, and struck her on the head because she clung to him.'

There was a dangerous, unconscious triumph in look and tone which did not escape von Lichtenberg. 'The girl lives, and he knows it,' was his thought, and raising his voice so as to be heard by all near, he said, 'If there be any here who can tell me how the band who sacked Burgstein found entrance, ten gold pieces are theirs, and a free pardon.'

He paused. Basil was taken by surprise; this was not what he had expected, but he immediately saw how it bore on the matter in hand, and awaited what answer would be made in anxiety not lost on the Graf. No one moved or spoke; terror at the presence of their lord, despair at what they had already suffered, made every one dumb.

'Hear, all,' he repeated, 'on the word of a knight and noble I will give ten golden crowns and pardon, though he threw the first brand, to him who reveals how he entered Burgstein.'

Again silence answered, but there was a slight thrill and stir among the listeners. He smiled and looked at Herr Basil, who met his dark and subtle eyes without blenching.

'Whoso would gain the reward may seek me at Schloss Geyer,' he added, and, bowing to the priest, he rode slowly away.

His departure broke the spell which held all dumb. A low whisper ran through the church, heads were bent

close together, muttered remarks were interchanged. Even the sick, lying on heaps of dry leaves, roused themselves.

'Forget not, my children, that there is a curse on gold gained by the harm of another,' said Herr Basil, emphatically, and the whisper ceased, but presently began again. Christine Scheurlin came to his side.

'Reverend sir, I will do your bidding,' she whispered. 'Many must know who showed the secret way, and once the Graf hears that, he will piece all together. It is such a great bribe to these poor folks—they may not betray what they know to-day or to-morrow, but sooner or later they will.'

He signed assent in deep anxiety, and she took her way towards Schloss Geyer, but turned out of it to visit the Bannwart's cottage. Magdalene had been hardly less occupied than Herr Basil; heavy as her own load of care was, she could think of little but the dire distress around her, and Dornröschen had lent all her little aid to mend and make garments and prepare salves and potions, identifying herself with Magdalene and the sufferers in a resolute, energetic way which struck Magdalene, little time as she had to observe it. Christine Scheurlin found her at work on clothes for a family who had lost all their possessions. She looked up with a pleased welcome as the bailiff's wife appeared, but did not cease from her task.

'All, and more than all, is needed,' she said.

'Alas! I know it; I have come from the village.'

'You do not come, I trust, to seek remedies for yourself?'

'No, thanks to you, I am strong and well again. But, O dear Frau, I bring heavy tidings.'

'My son!'

'Not of Hildemund?' Magdalene and Rosilde exclaimed together.

'No, no, I have heard nought of him; I meant not to scare you thus—and the little one too—' she answered, struck with the terror in Rosilde's wide open eyes. 'But Graf Lichtenberg is come, and he seeks on

all sides to know the truth of the tale that the little Burgfräulein perished in the sacking of the castle.

'Muhme! let us go away!' cried Rosilde, throwing herself on Frau Magdalene.

'Fear not any word of mine,' said Christine, seeing Magdalene's alarm at the child's self-betrayal. 'You whose tender care saved my life, and in whose arms my little baby died—— I knew by the Fräulein's looks and ways long ago who she must be, but I and my husband and brother would sooner die than betray you. But there are others . . . . You must hence at once; the Herr Pfarrer bade me tell you so.'

'Now! in this time of need!'

'We cannot go when we are undoing some of the harm these cruel lords work,' said Rosilde, forgetting her terror, and bringing a smile to the lips of 'Die Scheurlin,' who could not guess how deep a feeling underlay the childish importance.

'You must;' and Christine unfolded her plan. Magdalene must collect such few possessions as could be carried on horseback, and accompany Christine's brother to Dornstadt, the nearest large town.

'All which you leave here I will fetch and keep for you,' she said; 'from Dornstadt surely you can reach some refuge where the Graf cannot track you. Only linger not, I beseech you.'

Magdalene was forced to admit that danger was imminent, but she felt such reluctance and regret at going that had it not been for Rosilde's sake she could not have torn herself away.

'To leave all my sick thus and now! not even a word of farewell!' she said. The rest of the day and part of the night was spent in hurried arrangements, so as to be ready to go by dawn. She hoped that Herr Basil would come and bid her farewell, but he feared the Graf's spies, and did not stir out of the village. Ulfric she must see if no one else ere she went away. She took her herb-box as an excuse for being late abroad, but she was deaf to Rosilde's supplications to accompany her. She left her locked in the sound sleep of child-

hood, and exchanged her sad last words with the leper while night gathered darkly on the forest. She had reason to be glad of her caution, for returning she came full on the Graf, with Kunz riding beside him. She saw him point to her with his whip, and evidently ask a question as they rode on. The relief of having escaped such a danger almost made her forget the pain of leaving one who needed her so much, and who loved Hildemund so well. All the rest of the night was spent in preparations. Some things she had begged Ulfric to take for himself; others Christine Scheurlin would fetch, and distribute among the needy villagers. Every moment was so full that she had hardly time to realise how suddenly and entirely her whole past life was swept away, and all the quiet work of years ended. She made her preparations with swift, unfaltering hands, allowing herself only to think of the present moment, and looking neither back nor onward. There would be time to grieve by-and-bye: there was none now. And so, by dawn, she was ready, and had roused Dornröschen, and made her eat, forcing herself to do the same, for she knew she should need all her strength.

Christine's brother came to the door to summon her, and carry her bundle, into which she had put as many of her books as she could, and she stepped out, leading Dornröschen, and left the home where she had passed all the years which made up life to her, and shed no tear, though it seemed to her as if she left her heart itself behind her. Looking into her face, her companions read something written there which kept them silent, and not a word passed until she mounted the horse waiting for her, and took Rosilde in her arms. Then the child said mournfully, 'Poor Ulfric! what will he do without us, Muhme?' And then the tears rushed suddenly into Magdalene's eyes, and for many minutes blinded her.

CHAPTER XX.

Had Graf von Lichtenberg known of his son's orders to the bailiff of Burgstein he would have countermanded them, not from pity for the serfs—he knew no such weakness—but from a perception that to punish them thus was to his own loss. During the greater part of the war he had remained in Italy, and when he returned, the rising in Würtemberg in favour of the banished Duke gave him full occupation. But he was fully purposed to go as soon as might be to the Ilzthal, and investigate the history of the attack upon the castle. He had taken it for granted that Walther the seneschal had planned it with a view to rescuing his master's child, and he had small belief therefore in the tale, accepted unquestioningly by Wolfgang's duller mind, that the heiress of Burgstein had been murdered or burned when the castle was set on fire. Walther would have taken good care that she should be unharmed. An accidental meeting with the prior of Marienau destroyed this hypothesis, for in casual talk over the siege of the monastery, and the losses and troubles arising out of the war, the share taken by the old seneschal in the defence, and the fact of his death were named. Walther then had been at Marienau at the very moment when Graf Lichtenberg had supposed him leading the peasants; he must have fled there immediately after his encounter with Kunz, and had never again quitted his asylum. The mystery grew darker than ever, but the Graf had no fear but that he should unravel it when on the spot, and his first step was to visit the ruins and look round with keen and close observation.

The walls yet stood, blackened and scorched, and all woodwork gone, and the way into the underground passage yawned black and open, but all this revealed nothing more than he knew already. He had Kunz and the bailiff with him, and asked a question now and

then as he looked about him. Kunz related anew the events of the attack, as far as he knew them; the bailiff had seen little, for he lived in his own house, near the village, and knowing himself hated by all the peasants on the domain as one who always had egged on the Freiherr to severity, and used his delegated authority with all the harshness he dared, he had fled for his life from the valley as soon as he saw the flames. The peasants had set his dwelling on fire before they marched away, and it was with a personal satisfaction that he had carried out Wolfgang's orders to burn the village.

Graf von Lichtenberg turned towards the chapel. No unquiet stirring of conscience troubled him as he entered it and stood where the body of the Freiherr had been laid, but Kunz looked gloomy and reluctant; since his meeting with Walther he had never got rid of an angry fear that St. Eustace might play him some ugly trick, instead of honourably considering the matter settled and expiated. He lingered outside, while the Graf passed in, looking as he usually did somewhat weary and cynical, but not at all as if any crime lay on his soul. The chapel had suffered less than any other part of the castle. Some feeling of respect for a consecrated place had hindered the peasants from purposely destroying it, and the thick walls resisted the fire which raged without. The glass had fallen from the windows, and the leadwork had melted, but there was little or nothing to burn. Von Lichtenberg looked up and down, and his eye fell on the stone which lay above the bodies of Dietrich von Burgstein and his wife Faustina. His face changed a little, and a light suddenly flickered in his eyes for an instant. The dust which lay thickly elsewhere had been brushed away from the stone, and a wreath of wild rose, fruit and leaves, tinged by the first frost lay upon it.

'Who put this here?' he asked.

'Indeed, my lord, I know not,' said the bailiff, surprised.

'They are scarce withered; they were placed here

newly . . . Aye, 'tis just a year since the Freiherr died.'

'Methinks I did see some one—a woman and a child, I think, coming down the road from hence some two days ago,' said the bailiff, 'but I was too far off to see in the dusk who they might be, and I marked them not. It is strange, in truth,' he added, wondering, as well he might, who in all the valley could cherish the memory of the Freiherr enough to thus celebrate the anniversary of his death.

'A woman and a child,' the Graf said to himself. 'And roses—the roses of Burgstein.'

He felt sure now that Rosilde lived, and was not far off; he was on her track, and riding to the Ilzthal he offered his bribe and left it to work, secure that it would take effect.

He was right. A day or two later not one, but half-a-dozen poor wretches stole up to Schloss Geyer, ready to tell him all they could. He heard each patiently, since from each story some grain of information might perhaps be sifted, and dismissed them, bidding them share the guerdon among them. Hildemund Dahn then, not Walther the seneschal, had admitted Kaspar the serf and his band into Burgstein—that fair lithe lad with whom Wolfgang had quarrelled, the son of Graf Geyer's banner-bearer. Was it out of revenge on Wolfgang that he had done this? No matter; the boy who had brought Rosilde the Dompfaff, and defended it from Wolfgang was not likely to have let the child perish. And then von Lichtenberg thought of the wreath upon the gravestone, and of the woman and child whom the bailiff had seen, and he smiled to himself.

He was not one to lose time when he saw his way clearly, and a few hours later he stood before the Bannwart's house. Kunz and a couple of men at arms were not so far off but that a whistle would bring them out of the forest in a moment.

The house was closed, and there was no sign of life about it. Hardly forty-eight hours had passed since

Magdalene left it, and yet it already had a deserted solitary look which struck him.

'How now! This Mistress Magdalene Dahn is abroad, it would seem,' he muttered. 'Locked! and all still—nay, something stirs.'

He turned sharply in the direction of a sound, which came from a shed where Magdalene had left such things as she hoped might be of use to Ulfric, who could not enter her house, since his presence would have rendered it unclean and unfit for anyone else to inhabit. He had come as much to look at the house where those so dear to him had dwelt as to fetch these things, and now, emerging from the shed, came face to face with Graf Lichtenberg.

If any change came on the muffled face of the leper, none could see it, but Graf Lichtenberg stepped back with haughty repugnance.

'How, leper! what does such as thou about the dwellings of Christian men? Take thy foul presence hence. Yet stay—where is the woman who owns this house?'

'Wherefore should I tell thee that, Graf?'

'Base scum! dost dare answer me thus? Where is she, I say?'

'Beyond thy reach,' answered Ulfric, addressing him with no token of respect, but as equal to equal.

'How! art thou acting a part in this matter? I will have thee burned on a slow fire! I tell thee I know right well that this woman, this Magdalene Dahn, has in hiding the child Rosilde von Burgstein. Wilt thou tell me where she is?'

'I will not tell thee, lord of Lichtenberg, nor will I aid thee to add another crime to a list long enough already. What didst thou in the Eschthal a year ago? How long is it since thou gavest thy sworn brother-in-arms to the headsman, and didst play fast and loose with the Bundschuh in Würtemberg, and well-nigh deliver up thy liege lord the Duke into the hands of the Swabian League?'

'Thou knowst too much for thy life to suit my

safety,' said the Graf, struck and gloomy. 'Who art thou, leper?'

'My name, when I had one, was thine own; I am Ulfric von Lichtenberg, thine elder brother's son,' answered Ulfric, in a voice of bitterness.

'Thou! thou! Miserable wretch! I thought thee dead long since, thou disgrace to thy kindred!' exclaimed the Graf, stepping back, and more disconcerted than he would have been had a ghost from the grave risen before his eyes.

'Dead have I been these eight years—dead to kith and kin and the world. What dost thou call this but death? Nay, ten times worse; had I died indeed, then masses had been sung for me, and some might even yet think of me and name me gently, and my grave would be among those of my kinsfolk, in holy ground.'

'So thou art here! Yet alive. Curses on the day I found thee and learned thy name!' muttered von Lichtenberg.

'Dost think I wished to meet thee? Have I forgotten thy feigned pity, thy secret triumph, when the plague came upon me, and I became an outcast, and, Ebbo being dead, thou wert heir of our house? But, leper though I be, I counsel thee to work no ill to Rosilde of Burgstein, or I will make thee rue it.'

'Thou! Hast yet to learn that the word or oath of a leper counts for nought?' said von Lichtenberg, struggling to recover his ordinary cold and scoffing tone. 'Dost think Heaven will work a miracle in thy behalf, and make thee whole that thou mayst witness against me?'

'Beware how thy injurious tongue challenges Heaven,' said Ulfric; 'to defend the helpless and confound such as thee I verily believe a miracle will be wrought. Seek no more for Rosilde of Burgstein, I tell thee, lest thou call destruction on thy head.'

The Graf turned away with a low, deep curse, and strode into the forest. Ulfric looked after him with a harsh laugh. 'So we meet again! I knew not that aught could so move this uncle of mine. Truly, to find

a leper-nephew instead of the heiress of Burgstein might somewhat vex him. A miracle!—no, there are none now; but if it could be—if it could be—then would I give the life restored to me to protect the oppressed and comfort the sick. Some lives should be less sad for what I have endured.'

Meanwhile, startled and dismayed as he had seldom yet been, beyond anything Ulfric guessed, the Graf was none the less bent on his purpose. 'Accursed chance!' he was thinking; 'I deemed him dead—his mother deceived me—she must supply his wants from her convent. What if he or she knew that, leper though he be, he can claim his revenues? Were he best out of the world? Nay, he can scarce harm me without Thomas Knades play me false, and I think he at least is dead, since I hear nought of him. Ulfric can scarce cross my path, though he knows too much. But he will not bring shame on our name; he will hold his peace for all his vaunting.'

He mounted the horse which his attendants were holding, and signed to them to follow. 'He knows too much,' von Lichtenberg went on thinking. 'The priest knows, too, that matter of the Eschthal; he learned it through confession, doubtless—this rascal of mine believes in hell, and will have run to him for shelter—' he threw a contemptuous glance at Kunz—'but the confessional keeps its secrets—at least with a man like this Basil. But Walther the seneschal knew too, and who told *him*?'

Those concerned in Magdalene's flight kept the secret for their own sakes as well as hers. No efforts of von Lichtenberg's could detect whither she had gone, and all the valley mourned her loss and marvelled at her sudden disappearance.

To learn her history was the Graf's next step; that she was no common person he easily ascertained, and he thought he could easily learn what he desired from Graf Geyer. But to Graf Geyer the marriage of his banner-bearer was only important as a means of rewarding at small cost or pains a faithful follower, and he recollected

little about the circumstances. By diligent search, however, and patient inquiry, and such clue as he had already, von Lichtenberg ascertained in Magdalene's native town to what family she belonged, and that by the mother's side she was of Paumgärtner blood. Ill-pleased as he was to find how powerful were her kindred, he felt himself on the way to attain his ends, for neither in law nor justice could they withhold his ward, and he set close watch on Nüremberg, in order to learn immediately when the fugitives should arrive there, for thither he did not doubt they were making their way. Weeks and months, however, passed by, and no tidings reached him, for Magdalene Dahn had unconsciously defeated his calculations by turning her steps to Ulm.

CHAPTER XXI.

So many were the difficulties of travel, and so great the dangers from wandering land knechts, starving fugitives, and robber lords ready to fall on every traveller worth plundering, or any party escorting merchandise from one city to another, that over half a year elapsed before Magdalene saw Ulm, and during that time it had neither been possible to obtain any news from Hildemund, nor to learn whether her letter had reached Ulm. The last part of her journey across the belt of rainy green country which yet divided her from Ulm was made in a rough country cart, as if she had been a peasant woman journeying with her child, and perhaps a husband or brother. It was a safe manner of travelling enough, exciting no one's notice or cupidity, and thus they went through the plain, where a veil of mist hung over the many streams and osier grounds, and Magdalene's heart beat faster as far off they could see the City of the Elms, its long line of gables, towers, and spires rising along the softly sloping banks past which the broad green Danube swept with majestic flow, proudly guarding the free Imperial city.

Above all other buildings rose the tower of the Minster, yet uncompleted, but bidding fair to fulfil the ambition of the burghers, and set the statue of the Virgin, which was to crown it, so high that she should look down upon her rival sister on the summit of the Domkirche at Cologne. The twenty years which had passed since Magdalene had seen the mighty tower had hardly perceptibly advanced it, though much labour and treasure had been lavished on it; it was growing slowly, and absorbing as it were into itself the interests and lives of its citizens, now making progress when the city was prosperous, then pausing when civil tumults or outside dangers occupied all minds and exhausted men's purses, and gaining each day in grandeur and beauty as time and weather touched it with innumerable tints and shades, and harmonised all which was new with that which was old.

Magdalene had no fear but that her uncle would give her a welcome from his heart, but she felt less secure of her reception from his daughter and son-in-law; and she knew that the child with her, who must pass for a Dahn, would find no favour in their eyes. She had her fears too how the high-spirited heiress of Burgstein would comport herself under cold or scornful treatment, and of all the many anxious moments which she had passed since leaving the Ilzthal, perhaps this was one of the worst. To go in her peasant's cart up to the doors of her kinsfolk she could not venture, especially as for anything she knew her letter had never reached them, and she directed her driver to the 'Three Kings;' for low as her resources had become, she knew she must not do discredit to her kindred by alighting at any but the chief hostelry of the city, opposite the Rathhaus.

Magdalene had known Ulm well in childhood, and she recognised one familiar spot after another, as the cart jolted through the rough narrow streets, with their high-roofed houses, and their gables rising in quaint steps. Then the square before the Rathhaus was reached, where women in gold-embroidered caps were

standing with pitchers at a fountain, and the sign of the 'Three Kings' invited travellers to pause and enter. Rosilde, sitting by Magdalene's side, was gazing in wonder around her. In all their wanderings they had been in no such centre of busy commercial life as this, and the number of passers-by, the waggons laden with bales which passed by, or stood at the doors of stately houses, marked out as those of merchants by the crane projecting from some hooded dormer window, the bustle and stir, almost frightened her.

'Is this Ulm?' she asked. 'O Muhme! what a great lady that must be!'

She pointed to a corner house, with a wide doorway, surmounted by a carved stone arch, within which was a coat of arms. A tall and stately woman, with a train and hanging sleeves, was going up the steps, followed by a servant in green and white livery, carrying her embroidered prayer-book. Magdalene was perplexed for a moment, for the costume was rather that of a noble lady than a burgher dame, and she had yet to learn that in the twenty years which had elapsed since she had seen Ulm, the wives of the 'Geschlechter' had assumed as nearly as possible the dress of the highest class, defying all edicts to restrain them, though very indignant if women of the lower burgher families attempted to do the same. The next instant, as the lady looked round for her servant, Magdalene knew who it was. 'Katharina!' she murmured to herself.

The cart stopped at the inn door just as Katharina Paumgärtner disappeared within her house. Magdalene alighted and paid the driver; no one about the inn troubled himself about such humble travellers, and indeed, had they been much more imposing they would have had in great measure to look to their own comfort, for there was no eagerness to attract or please customers, or save them trouble, in any German hostelry. She entered the great kitchen, where all travellers, except of the highest distinction, were entertained, and sitting down, waited until the host stopped talking to a couple of travelling scholars, who had the last news

from Wittenberg to give, and passed near. Then she spoke, and humble as had been the manner of her arrival, and worn and simple as was her dress, something of calm command in her voice and air at once caught the attention of the landlord, used to see and judge a great variety of customers.

'Good host,' she said, 'can you send a messenger to Master Philip Welser, and tell him that there is one here who prays him to come to her?'

'Surely,' he answered, his little grey eyes examining her attentively.

'Will you send no name—lady?'

Magdalene smiled as he added the title after a moment's hesitation.

'What I have said will suffice, I think, good Master Barthel.'

His name had suddenly returned to her memory, though years had passed since she thought of it; all the associations connected with her visit in early girlhood to Ulm seemed awakening with strange vividness.

'How, lady, you know me? Yet I remember not your face, though I thought I never forgot a customer, and surely . . . . But I will do your errand,' he said, reflecting that the easiest way of satisfying his curiosity, at no time small, was to fetch Master Welser. 'Is there nothing I can set before you or your little daughter?'

Magdalene was glad to give Rosilde some occupation while awaiting the uncle whom she had not seen for so long. She sat thinking, more of the past than the present, wondering at the change which these years had made in her old playmate, Katharina, and if her husband, Hans Paumgärtner, remembered at all that once Magdalene herself had been destined for him. Had not Kilian Dahn stepped in, this would have been her fate, and her family and friends would have thought it a most honourable and suitable one, and nobody would have supposed it necessary to consult her at all. Her heart was full of the husband whom none here had known, and whose name was so unwelcome a sound in

their ears. The knowledge of this made his memory if possible yet dearer to her. She hardly recollected where she was, while she sat thinking, and the other guests took small heed of her. There were a party of slender, swarthy Italians, on their way to Nüremberg or Augsburg, where they hoped to find work as architects; several waggoners, laying in a hearty meal before setting forth on their journey; some country people, to whose marvelling ears a quack doctor was holding forth. They talked and laughed, and drank out of great beer cans, and paid for their meal in all sorts of small coins. As the travelling students pushed back their plates they felt about vainly in their pockets, and one said with a laugh, 'Mine host, the pouch is empty—money I have none, but an you will, I will sing this worthy company a song as payment for our entertainment.'

'An the song be good and well sung I accept the bargain,' said the portly landlord, with a laugh.

Magdalene heard what was said, and looked rather anxiously towards the door, for jests and songs at that day and in such a place were seldom fit for women's ears, but the messenger had not yet returned.

'Of that the worshipful company shall judge,' said the student, who had paid his score not unfrequently in this fashion. 'Thou, Friedl, take the bass.'

And in pleasant voices enough the two young men began a song in favour just then among their brotherhood, which was received with sufficient favour to cause the host to say, 'Another, my masters, another, and the score is acquitted.'

They looked at one another as if hesitating what to choose, and the bass-voiced student said, 'Sing the last lay that reached us—the Marienstein.'

The guests had listened with more or less careless ears to the dashing student song, which they only half understood, though the manner in which it was sung amused and attracted them, but as the first sweet and pathetic notes of the new lay came on their ears there was a general stir of attention and pleasure, and heads

nodded in time, and even the critical Italians murmured 'bravo!' under their breath.

'Well sung! and a most sweet song!' said the landlord, as it ended. 'Whence comes it?'

'*We* know,' whispered Rosilde, looking with shining eyes at Magdalene, who made a sign for silence.

'That I cannot tell, good landlord. Many ask whence come these sweet and stirring songs, but they are no more to be traced than the wind which seems to spread them abroad.'

He stopped short, for the landlord turned hastily away, and the lifting of caps and rising of all the Ulmers present showed that the old man now standing in the doorway was one of the city authorities. Indeed, this was told not only by his dignified bearing, but by the four-cornered cap which marked the doctor of learning, and the fineness of the materials which composed his dress, though he wore at that moment no official costume, but the woollen doublet, the grey shoes with black buckles, the red stockings buckled below the knee breeches, and the leathern girdle and pouch, which was the usual home undress of a burgher. He bowed gravely to all present, and then advancing to Magdalene, who had risen to meet him, '*Gott grüss'dich*, dear niece,' he said, in a voice full of kindness; 'you are welcome among your kindred.'

He laid one hand on the head of Rosilde, who was gazing up at him, much impressed by his height and stately air. 'Good Master Barthel, I am much indebted to you, for your messenger brought me glad tidings, since this is my niece, whom these evil times have driven from her home, and who has now—praised be God!—reached us after long travel. Dear child, we have looked for thee long; thy letter reached us four good months ago, and we have feared that some ill had befallen thee.'

'Good uncle,' said Magdalene, touched to the heart at realising that she was among her own kindred after years of separation and solitude, 'I need not tell you

how many perils delay and beset a traveller nowadays; hardly dared I hope to win through them.'

'Let us home, and then thou shalt tell all the tale. Doubtless thou and the child—how call you her?—are weary.'

'I am Dornröschen,' Rosilde answered for herself, while Magdalene hesitated for a truthful answer.

'So! We have a guest out of a fairy tale,' said Herr Welser, smiling. 'But thou art awake; has the doom not yet come, or has the prince aroused thee?'

'Hildemund is the prince; he will come by-and-bye,' she gravely answered.

'Ah ha! Hildemund—aye; I would thy boy had accompanied thee, fair niece. Good-day, Master Barthel; all know there is right good entertainment in the "Three Kings," but my niece must not first break bread under any roof but mine.'

And again saluting the company with a dignified bend of the head he led the way out, leaving them to discuss the event which had just taken place. That a niece of Master Philip Welser's should have arrived was enough to set tongues wagging, but the war had caused such general distress and ruin that her humble dress and manner of journeying excited no wonder. The few words intentionally spoken by Master Welser had sufficiently explained her story. The only thing which perplexed the landlord was why she had not gone at once with her child to the corner house. He stood and watched her across the square, until she was under the doorway, before he turned back to scold his servants and attend to his customers.

'Blessed be the good God who hath brought thee back to us, niece Magdalene,' said the old man, as they entered. 'Twenty years since thou didst cross this threshold, when thy parents went hence to Aarburg, and never once since have mine eyes beheld thee. The maiden of fifteen has become a fair matron, yet methinks I should have known thee. Follow me, and we will seek my Katharina, once thy little playmate. My good son, her husband—thou hast not forgotten thy cousin,

Hans Paumgärtner?—he is busied in the warehouse, but he will be here anon, and well pleased to find thee arrived. Beware, beware, little maid, thou wilt else slip on these oaken stairs.'

Magdalene followed in silence, with some inward doubt of how the haughty dame whom she had caught a glimpse of would receive her, and Dornröschen gazed around her, half believing that she really was in fairy land. During their journey they had halted in convents or very humble hostelries, and nothing which she had ever seen in her life had prepared her for the magnificent luxury of a rich merchant house. At Burgstein there had been indeed a rude profusion, and the hall had a size and height which was imposing, but all the other rooms were small, and there was everywhere entire indifference to adornment and comfort, and disdain of luxury, for to the Freiherr these things represented effeminacy, while his wife observed a studied asceticism in all her surroundings. In the dwellings of the rich burghers, on the contrary, though there was not the love of art and beauty which is instinctive in Italy, there was an amount of comfort and wealth very striking to an unaccustomed eye. As in all the houses of Ulm merchants, the lower part was devoted to warehouses, but on the first floor were stately rooms, into one of which Herr Welser conducted them. It was empty, and while he called his daughter, Magdalene looked around and remembered it, and Rosilde gazed at the windows with painted glass in them, the seats with their richly carved backs, the beautifully carved chests and cabinets, the tables, on which were caskets of ebony and ivory, and her face grew more and more wonderstruck, until, espying a little spinning wheel, she exclaimed in a voice of relief, 'Look, Muhme! there is a wheel like yours!'

The familiar object seemed to reassure her.

'Yes, my little one,' said Magdalene, smiling, 'and see this great book, bound in pigskin; it is the Bible wherein I used to read when I was here, and on this table'—she pointed to one made of slate, with squares

marked upon it—'I learned to play chess with my good uncle.'

'Will he teach me too?' asked Rosilde, beginning to recover from her first awe. Magdalene had no time to answer, for the door opened, and her cousin advanced to greet her, followed by Master Welser. Her embrace was cordial, but she took no notice of Rosilde, who surveyed her with mingled admiration and dislike.

'Welcome, cousin,' she said; 'we have had many masses sung for your safety. You have been long absent from us all.'

She spoke with kindness, but with a touch of condescension, which Magdalene felt more keenly than she liked to own to herself. 'I have sent to tell my husband of your coming. You know, I think, that I am wedded to one of your mother's family, and that we live with my father. Here he is.'

Magdalene looked with a certain amused interest at the man who came to welcome her, and whom all her family would have thought her so fortunate to marry instead of Kilian Dahn. He had forgotten all about that episode; it had only been a business affair, and others, far weightier, had long ago put it out of his mind. Magdalene could see that what was so fresh in her memory never so much as crossed his. He did not know—fortunately—how many tears she had shed once upon a time at the prospect of becoming his wife. Magdalene had been a high-minded, fastidious girl, to whom the young merchant had seemed of the earth earthy, with no higher ideal than making a fortune, and she had shrunk from him with silent, intense aversion. It seemed strange to her now that she could have spent so much strong feeling upon him. He was in middle age like hundreds of other men, and they met with cousinly friendliness, though in both him and his wife she could perceive a sort of pitying curiosity and a touch of condescension to her, the unprosperous widow, returned after all these years. No one took any notice of Rosilde, standing by her, and gazing at these strangers. Children counted for little in the presence

of their elders, and there was nothing marked in this, yet Magdalene felt, as she had never done before, that her little Dornröschen was the Edelfräulein of Burgstein, and that this neglect was not her due, and she resented it, though she felt that the fewer who knew the secret the safer for the child. She was glad when Master Welser said, 'Take my cousin and the little one to her chamber, my daughter; it has been long prepared for them. I have bidden fetch her luggage from the "Three Kings."'

'A slender stock, in truth,' said Magdalene; 'for we could carry little with us.'

'Well, well, Katharina will furnish all which is needed. Tarry not too long, dear niece, for I can scarce believe thou art among us again, the more welcome that thou hast brought us thy fairy maiden.'

Rosilde looked suddenly up in his face with a smile, and he patted her head kindly. He was very fond of children, while his daughter professed to dislike them. When she returned alone he said musingly, 'Poor Lena! Little did I or any think what would befall her not two years after she left this house! A sad fate and a strange, yet she has become a most fair and sweet woman; there is that in her face which tells of one who dwells among noble thoughts. If her boy Hildemund be like her he should be a son to make a mother's heart glad. I am well pleased that she has that little maid with her; didst see the smile she gave me? It will be as sunshine in the old house to have a child in it; I ever think a house without children is as a cage without birds.'

Katharina winced, and her tone was very cold as she answered, 'I love not the brats, and I know not how any belonging to the low-born man whom a haughty noble forced upon our family should be welcome to us. Never before did Welser or Paumgärtner marry below them, and though it is no fault of Magdalene's, in her place I had never shown my face again among my kindred, least of all, have brought a Dahn with me to shame me.'

'Why, daughter, what would you have her do with

the orphan child whom she tells us a dying mother entrusted to her?' asked Philip Welser, reprovingly.

'Was there no convent wherein to bestow her? But that may yet be done.'

'Nay, I think not that Lena will desire it. It is easy to see the child is dear to her. You who like not children cannot guess how they twine round one's heart, Käthchen.'

'No, I like them not,' said the childless mother, with a bitter smile.

'No word thereof to thy cousin,' said Master Welser, quite unconscious of the stab he had given. 'Mark that. Shame were it and scandal if Lena dwelt elsewhere than under my roof, since she wills not to seek her mother; yet such words as thou hast but now spoken would surely drive her home. She is no dependent, forget not that; the revenues of her father, which she has not touched since she left her home, and never spent to the full at any time, if slender beside those of thy husband, are ample for her needs. And there is but her boy to inherit all which her mother and thine uncles at Nüremberg have to leave, Dahn though he be.'

Katharina made no answer, and he did not guess that although she, like all the rest, felt Magdalene's marriage as a great family humiliation, and resented the comments which would be made on that plebeian name of hers among the proud Ulmer families, the sharpness of her tone was chiefly caused by his own words about Dornröschen. Who should know how empty a childless house was so well as she! The sight of women with their babies in their arms, or clinging about them, sent a sharp pang through her heart, and it was almost intolerable to hear her father rejoice in the presence of this little intruder. Too proud and reserved to own the crook in her lot, she brooded over it in silence; Rosilde would never find favour in her eyes. The more at home she became, the more she grew in favour with Master Welser, and even won the heart of his son-in-law, Hans Paumgärtner, the less Katharina could like

her. Magdalene early saw this, and constantly feared that Rosilde would resent it; but Rosilde, in her childish way, was full as proud and reserved as Katharina, and ignored all slights with singular indifference. Magdalene would ask herself whether she did not perceive Katharina's hardly veiled contempt and aversion, or whether, knowing after all that she was Burgfräulein of Burgstein, she was careless of them. In fact, however, Rosilde cared very little what those to whom she was indifferent felt or thought, and to Katharina she was entirely indifferent. It could not diminish the bitterness which Katharina felt, that her husband showed in his ways to Rosilde how dear a child of his own would have been; until now he had never manifested any great liking for children, and indeed seemed absorbed both in and out of warehouse and counting-house in his large business; but before Rosilde had been in the Welser home a week his voice might be heard constantly calling for her. She was privileged to seek him even in his counting-house, make seals of red wax and stamp them with his signet, and strew sand on his letters from the ivory box upon his table. With Philip Welser she was an equal favourite, and among the servants and clerks she ruled like a little queen. She had indeed certain pretty, imperious ways very difficult to resist; Magdalene herself came as near to spoiling her as conscience and the strict discipline of the time allowed—sometimes a little nearer, for Rosilde was the only one here who knew and loved Hildemund, who was ever eager to speak of him and hear all which his mother would tell her about him, nay, who identified herself so entirely with Magdalene that unconsciously the widow, who could speak of her husband to no one else here, learned to tell this unwearied listener, with her large, sympathising eyes, much about Kilian Dahn, and how she had learned to love him, and understand how good and tender and brave he was.

Katharina was kind, if somewhat cold, to Magdalene herself, but after a while they seldom met, except when meals assembled all the family; the mistress of the

house was occupied with her household, her friends, and her embroidery; and Magdalene and Rosilde lived in the rooms given up to them, finding some occupations and interests for themselves, and spending a good deal of time with Master Welser, who was not only what was then called a Humanist, but an archæologist as well. He now took little active part in city matters, unless called on to give his advice in some unusually weighty affair, but busied himself in corresponding with learned men, both in Germany and other countries. It was a time when there was a great stir in literary matters, as well as in all which concerned theology, and there was a constant correspondence carried on between learned men even in very distant places. The Welser family had been foremost in bringing manuscripts from Greece and Constantinople, and plants and animals from the New World, and Philip Welser had too a goodly collection of antiquities which were the pride of his heart; and it was with some amused contempt that he related to Magdalene how more than once he had run some danger from the Dominicans of Ulm, sworn foes of learning and investigation, by proving that some venerated relic was but the remains of heathen antiquity. He was compiling a chronicle of the history of Ulm, with loving pains and care, but his eyes were not as good at seventy as they had once been, and he was glad to avail himself of Magdalene's willing help in transcribing his pages. She had had the excellent education not unfrequently given to women in those days, especially to those of Nüremberg, and she was able to give valuable aid to her uncle. Rosilde would sit by, with her needlework or her task, looking up now and then at the old man, with his long, wise face, and the straight soft hair, now quite grey, which hung on his neck, his still stately figure wrapped in a loose and ample gown trimmed with fur. She liked to sit near him and listened with interest, which increased as she grew older, to the talk between uncle and niece; and she took no small pride in the visits which nobles and learned men often paid to the venerable old man, who was known to them all, though he had

refused a brilliant position at the Court of the third Frederic and first Maximilian, content to be a member of his own Rath, but who had travelled much and seen much, and sat at many a Reichstag.

It was a still, uneventful life, whose current of fast passing days was only stirred by occasional tidings from Hildemund, but it was without anxiety, and if Magdalene inwardly sighed for her old, free existence, and longed unspeakably for her boy, she could yet prize its security, and find good works not a few to do in Ulm. Into these Rosilde threw herself more and more with each year that went by. She seemed so entirely contented and forgetful of Burgstein that Magdalene almost thought that, transplanted so young, she must have forgotten her real name and history, and believed herself what all around deemed her—Röschen Dahn, the niece of Magdalene's husband. But Magdalene herself could only feel that that name and history were an ever-increasing perplexity, far worse now that the child was growing into the maiden than in the first time. That Dornröschen was no longer a child Magdalene first saw in Hildemund's eyes. Twice in these years he came to visit them, filling her heart with joy, but each time made her more conscious that he was reaching manhood, and Rosilde becoming a fair maiden, still too childlike indeed to hide that these meetings were the white days of her life, but old enough to be moulded by them for all after life. Magdalene knew that the child love might at any moment kindle into flame, and she feared that no one would ever reign in Hildemund's heart but the Burgfraülein, whom he was doing his best to put out of his reach. For, if ever the great domain of her ancestors were hers, Hildemund Dahn neither could nor would profit by it. Yet Magdalene could not but be glad, whatever came of it, that her kinsfolk here and at Nüremberg should see what a brave, fair, loving son she had! Even his proud grandmother looked approvingly on Hildemund.

He did not come merely for his pleasure. The Duke had entrusted to him letters and messages to

those whom he held to be his friends in the city, for he steadfastly kept in view his hope of regaining his duchy, although the revolving years brought little that was cheering to his cause. Now and then had come a transient gleam of success, but after each the gloom had thickened. Yet Ulrich and his few faithful friends would not despair, and now that his young son, Prince Christopher, was growing up, in honourable captivity at the Imperial Court, the princes of Bavaria, uncles to the boy, somewhat changed their tone of bitter hostility, and, if they did not desire to see Ulrich again lord of Würtemberg, they urged that it should be restored to his innocent son, their nephew, and although Archduke and Emperor were ill pleased, the House of Bavaria was too powerful to be easily silenced. These things seemed to promise a possible turn for the better in the long course of evil fortune which had followed Duke Ulrich.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE years of exile through which he had passed had changed Ulrich of Würtemberg inwardly even more than outwardly. If there were little in the saddened and serious man of middle age to recall the fair face and long bright hair which had won the boy ruler popular admiration and the name of Ulrich of the Curly Locks, there was still less which could awaken recollections of the domineering violence which had resulted in so many ill deeds and twice lost him his duchy. He had learned patience and pity for the oppressed, and the brave and constant front which he opposed to evil fortune had won even the reluctant admiration of his enemies. After the failure of the peasant rising he bided his time in Hohentwiel, and watched the deepening discontent in Würtemberg, where tax was heaped on tax, and the rule of Archduke Ferdinand began to irritate every class, from the highest to the lowest, especially the ecclesiastics. Ulrich knew by experience

how dangerous priestly discontent is, and his hopes brightened as time went by. It became evident that the Archduke sought to root out Ulrich's name and race, but the Duke knew that the growing suspicion and fear of the vast and increasing power of Austria which was widely spread among the princes of Germany would make even his worst enemies unwilling to see Würtemberg added to the domains of Hapsburg. Rather than that even Bavaria would have lent a hand to reinstate the banished Duke on his throne. Hildemund carried back encouraging news from Ulm; the Duke's party was gaining strength there, though the city had hitherto been devoted to the interests of the Swabian League, and if Ulm could be won over to his side not only a powerful ally were gained, but a great stumbling-block removed; for the burghers were at all times haughty and stiff-necked, caring little for princes and prelates, who often had humbly to borrow from their well-filled purses, and showing small respect to the Emperor himself. Ulrich did not love them, and had small cause to do so, but he did not spurn their friendship now as he would have done in his younger, headstrong days; he knew they were trusty allies, staunch and fearless. Hildemund was sent a second time to Ulm, and brought back the good news that the burghers, highly displeased at an attempt of the Emperor's to dictate to them in the matter of Lutheranism, were disposed to furnish moneys to enable Ulrich to make a fresh attempt on Würtemberg, and that they would secretly dispose the Swabian League to stand by and afford Ferdinand no active aid. News came from the duchy of increasing restlessness and dissatisfaction, and these were followed by the arrival of a monk, who though not an accredited ambassador, did not conceal that he was sent from the leading ecclesiastics of Würtemberg, to treat with the banished Duke. Hildemund had a glimpse of him as he arrived, and thought he had never seen so haggard a face nor such hollow, burning eyes under cowl or casque. As he turned to make the remark to Graf Eberstein, who chanced to be near another noble came up, exclaiming, 'Mary and Joseph!

who is yonder shaven crown? Sure some gibing devil looks through those eyes of his!'

'Methought they were the saddest I ever saw,' said Hildemund.

'Sad! I tell you there is a mocking fiend in them! Who may he be?'

'I know not, but we shall shortly hear; Max has taken him to the Duke's presence,' said Eberstein.

Nothing testified more strongly to the unity of aim and purpose among the small band of Ulrich's adherents than the equality which reigned among them. All distinctions seemed effaced here; Hildemund Dahn, having thrown in his lot with that of the banished Duke, to rise or fall with him, was received as readily as if he had been of noble birth by all in Hohentwiel. Though small, it was a goodly company, for there were not only some of the best and bravest of Würtemberg, but several had brought thither their wives and sons and daughters, and there was not a more gallant or polished little court in Germany than that within the walls of the old castle of Hohentwiel. Nowhere could Hildemund have been at a better school for grace and valour, and in few indeed would he have seen such reverent devotion and self-restraint. He had been received by the Duke with cordiality which won his whole heart, and held the office of his body squire,—a post readily acknowledged to be his by right, since it was known that thanks to him the Duke had escaped the snare laid for him by the Swabian League.

The monk had a private interview with Ulrich; but it was not long before all the little knot of friends who shared his fortunes were called into consultation. Ulrich had no secrets from these tried and faithful friends, almost every one of whom was an exile and landless for his sake, though they needed but to make submission to the Archduke to regain their possessions. Weal and woe were shared with them, even the youngest, and this was partly the secret of their boundless devotion to the lord who treated them as one with himself. Hildemund took his place with the rest when they were summoned

to counsel. Young as he still was, he had already, in the years spent at Hohentwiel, struck many gallant blows for the Duke; and if he sat low at the council board it was only on account of his youth, and the sons of Graf Eberstein, younger still, sat below him.

The monk looked from face to face as they took their places, scanning each, and he bent his head slightly as if in approval.

'My Lord Duke, if men count you poor they greatly err,' he said. 'I know not in all Christendom any prince who can count so many gallant friends as sit before you here.'

'Rightly said,' answered Ulrich, as his eye glanced over each countenance, turned to him with an answering smile. 'The best of Würtemberg is here. Think you the Duke can be so ill a man as his foes would have him, if he can win and keep such men as these? Now, good friends and brothers-in-arms all, hear what Father Arnolph has to say. It would seem that he has reason to believe that the clergy of my duchy love not the ruler whom it has pleased the Emperor and themselves to set over them. I was rather King Stork than King Log, but there are storks and storks. It might be they would welcome King Stork the First back again, but not, as you will guess, without certain conditions. Now, good father, your tale.'

It was a tale which aroused stormy discussion, to which Ulrich listened in silence, glancing now and then at the monk with a slight smile. If Father Arnolph were disappointed at the resolution manifested rather to do without the aid of the clergy than to buy it at the price of humiliating concessions, his pale and immovable countenance gave no sign of emotion.

'You hear, holy father,' Ulrich said, at last. 'My friends here speak as I myself had already spoken. Willing are we to yield somewhat, and ready to redress just grievances when we again rule our duchy, but not to the crippling of our rightful power. The mitre and cowl shall never dictate to Ulrich of Würtemberg. Nay, no more; you have our answer; bear it back to

all whom it may concern. But now I have something more to say. It would seem, my lords and gentlemen, that our Imperial master and his brother seek to blot out my name and family, and in answer to the remonstrances of my fair brother of Bavaria, the Archduke has shown so much gracious favour as to offer my daughter a place among the ladies who wait on his wife. Ulrich spoke with a haughty, smiling scorn, and a deep and angry murmur replied.

'To which offer the Princess Sabina replied that she would sooner take her daughter by the hand and go beg her bread,' said the low voice of the monk.

'For that I thank her; she spoke well,' said Ulrich, though the dark cloud came on his face which any mention of his wife always called up.

'It is scarce to tell us this that your highness keeps us here,' said Max von Schweinfurt, the oldest and most free spoken of his followers.

'No,' laughed Ulrich, 'I had scarce dared to call thee from the wine cup for so small a cause, old toper, least of all when Hildemund here was singing; for next to wine, song is dear to thee. Well, thou shalt have thy wine and thy song again speedily, but there are tidings which call for all our wit if ever we are to see my young son Christopher again without a shaven crown. What say you all to that?'

'How, my lord!' exclaimed several voices. 'Prince Christopher would enter the cloister?'

''Tis no case of would, my friends—who asks that of him? The Emperor likes ill the stir that Bavaria hath made touching the poor lad's rights, and it has entered the Imperial mind that it were well to have him beyond the Alps, into a Spanish cloister, so I learn.'

He waited for an answer from the amazed and indignant knights.

'Out on the traitorous plot!' they muttered. 'My lord, the thing must not be.'

'No, it must not be,' said Ulrich, lifting his head, while his voice deepened with profound indignation. 'Is it nothing that they have wrought such foul ill

against the father as never yet did prince brook, but they would end my line in a cloister? Bury the hope of Würtemberg in a monk's cowl! Out upon it! The boy must sure be a princely lad and a noble, else they had not feared him. Know you that 'twas only this very year he learned aught of me, his father, or so much as knew whether I were living or dead! so close was all kept from him. But best so! At least he has not heard the slanders that mine enemies spread against me!'

The Duke spoke with indescribable bitterness.

'Had he not been heard to say he would lose body and life rather than give up Würtemberg he had not come to this pass,' said the monk.

'It was well said!' exclaimed Graf Eberstein. 'Have you seen him, father?'

'I have,' answered the monk, briefly.

'What like is he? Did you have speech of him?'

'I had, else would he know nothing even now of his noble father.'

'So!' said Ulrich, much surprised. 'And wherefore risked you so much? How came you to speech of him?'

'I was sent on business of our abbey to Vienna, and the clergy of Würtemberg, as I have already said, have small cause to uphold the Archduke,' answered the monk, in the same low, passionless tone; and Ulrich laughed.

'I understand thee now. And a monk can ever find a moment for secret words.'

Father Arnolph made no reply to the taunt; no change ever seemed to come on the pallid and wasted countenance, in which the dark and vivid eyes alone seemed living, but to the repeated inquiry from the knights as to what the young prince was like, he answered, 'Tall and fair, much like yonder young squire,' looking at Hildemund; 'but he has long hair and curly, such as my lord here had at his age. The Emperor jests thereat, and says among his familiars that he will have it cut so short that his best friends shall not know him again.'

'How heard you that, monk?' asked Max von Schweinfurt, bluntly.

Father Arnolph did not appear to hear, and Ulrich said, with a bitter smile, 'Dost need to ask? Do not the priests hear all that men say? nay, all they think? Now, how to save the boy, and hinder that the long locks fall not under the cloister scissors?'

There was a silence of deep perplexity.

'The Prince's escort will go by way of Tyrol. Belike they will spend a night at St. Willibald, a cloister of our order,' said the monk, suggestively.

'Will the brotherhood aid him to escape?' asked Ulrich, eagerly. 'No, they will not compromise themselves.'

'Assuredly not, but if any plan were devised, and one harboured there who was friendly to him, he might get speech of the Prince.'

'True,' said Ulrich, looking round on the faces eagerly turned to him. 'But whom to send? Nay, Max, your blunt tongue would tell all, and you, Eberstein, and Regensburg, and every knight here, every one of you has looked my enemies too often in the face not to be recognised at once!'

'Who is in command of the party?' asked Eberstein.

'Graf Redwitz,' the monk answered.

'Ha! He has a keen eye; he would know me at once. Yet surely I can aid in this matter, for though my lands be in Würtemberg, where Archduke Ferdinand is graciously pleased to care for them in my stead, I was brought up as a child in Tyrol, and my foster brother and all his kin would risk their lives did I but hold up my finger to them. If the Prince could but win to their mountain home he should be so hidden that none but the eagles should know where he abode.'

'My lord,' began Hildemund, eagerly, but blushed and stammered, abashed at having ventured to speak where almost all were older than he.

'Well,' said Ulrich, smiling encouragement, 'say on. Wouldst save the son as once thou didst the father?'

The monk looked keenly for an instant at Hildemund.

'If it might be, my lord.'

'Well, thou art ever ready-witted. What is thy device? Wilt read him, too, a fable?'

'My lord, if I went as a gleeman perchance I might gain access to the Prince in the convent whereof this reverend father spoke, and make known to him some means of escape.'

'Gleemen, and such as they, would scarce receive hospitality within such walls,' observed Eberstein.

Ulrich looked at the monk, who answered the silent question with, 'If a gleeman chanced to come at the time when the Prince was harboured at St. Willibald, he would scarce be turned away. It is a Christian duty to shelter the poor and needy.'

There was a faint, unmistakable irony in his voice. Graf Eberstein glanced at him, and said aside to his next neighbour, 'Who is this monk?'

'I know not, any more than you, but sure a mocking devil dwells under his cowl! Whoever he be, he is one of whose wit and craft the convent thinks highly, else he were not here,' answered the noble addressed.

'Even if thou hadst speech of him, the brotherhood would scarce let him escape out of their walls, lest blame fall on them,' said Ulrich, looking at the monk, who bent his head assentingly.

'If the party spend the night at St. Willibald they will make a midday halt at Grünau,' said Graf Eberstein; 'and could the Prince once escape thence he should soon be where even the long arm of Charles V. should not reach him.'

'The heir of Würtemberg must not be buried in a cloister,' said Max von Schweinfurt; 'but, mark you, monk, neither must he usurp his father's seat. We will not have it.'

'It is Ulrich, not Christopher, that we need,' said Father Arnolph.

'Did you think so when you came here, holy father?' asked Ulrich, with a smile.

'I think so now,' he answered unmoved.

'Who will form the escort?' asked one of the knights.

'Von Redwitz and Hohenberg and one or two others are named, and young Regensberg and Wolfgang von Lichtenberg, doubtless, for, except Redwitz, no one knows the aim of the journey, and the Emperor would have it seem as if the Prince and one or two young companions went out to see another part of his dominions.

'Who is this Wolfgang von Lichtenberg?' asked Max von Schweinfurt.

'The son of the lynx,' answered Ulrich; 'hast forgotten? But I knew not that this Graf had risen to such favour with Austria that his wolf-cub should be thus honoured.'

'He knows how to climb,' answered Father Arnolph, briefly.

'It would seem so. Is the son like the father?'

'Nay, indeed. Rather will he one day overthrow all his father's schemes, for he is sullen and dogged, but honest and dull. You know him, Junker?' said Father Arnolph suddenly to Hildemund.

'I have seen him formerly,' said Hildemund, surprised. 'How guessed you that, father?'

'If you would keep your thoughts to yourself you must learn to rule your looks, young sir.'

'I will try. Did you say I was like the Prince?'

'Somewhat, seen from afar.'

'Then he shall steal away as the gleeman. The chance will be found or made,' said Hildemund, with a gay certainty which raised the spirits of his hearers; but the Duke laid his hand on his shoulder, and said in a lowered tone, 'Be not hasty to pledge thyself, dear youth; thou canst play the part, for though thou hast lost the sweet boy's pipe which caught mine ear at Sanct Anna, thou hast but changed the lark's voice for that of the thrush. But bethink thee, this matter may touch liberty, if not life.'

'My lord, let that go. I have little to fear, but if it should go ill with me, I would ask your highness to send a gracious message to my mother, and when Würtemberg is yours again, to do right to one you know of.'

'By my word as duke and knight I will,' answered

Ulrich, 'but I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose any;' and then, as if desirous to shake off anxious thoughts, he turned to the monk and said, 'We will speak again of these matters; but now 'tis late, and our ladies wait—and our meat also.'

'It does, my lord,' said Max von Schweinfurt.

'Aye, I can see thou art hard set, man!' laughed the Duke. 'I have noted well enough thy rueful countenance this hour past, but thy stomach can better wait than such business as this of ours. Come, my lords.'

They passed into the hall, and several ladies entered by another door, and all discussion of serious matters was put aside while the servants carried the meat round and filled the cups with wine. The chase was talked of, and arms, and politics, though nothing touching Würtemberg was said, and the new way to India was spoken of, and the increasing audacity of the Turks, and the death of the Elector of Saxony. Ulrich seemed unwilling to leave the board, and lingered after the meal was done, joining in the general conversation, and often addressing Father Arnolph with the frank and winning graciousness which none knew better how to show, and which had a peculiar charm in one so manly and stately as Ulrich. The monk made little response, but watched keenly all that passed, as one who had to bear back a full report to those who sent him. Ulrich was well aware how closely he was being studied, but he showed by no word or look that he knew it, although deeply conscious of how much would depend on the impression made upon this ecclesiastical ambassador.

'My lord, is the afternoon to pass without song?' asked one of the ladies present, as a pause and lull in the flow of talk occurred.

'Not so! This holy father, to whom I would fain show such poor honour as lies in our power shall judge how our Hildemund here is fitted to play the part he would assume,' said Ulrich. 'Thy zither, my squire. Who would think what rare sounds a cunning hand

can draw out of so rude an instrument? I love our zither; only a true German hand can deal with it.'

Hildemund sought his zither, and the Duke continued, to Father Arnolph, 'I know not how we should have passed many a stormy evening and weary day within these walls, but for my young squire's music. Now, give us of thy best, dear lad; yet how to choose where all are best?'

'Let us have the hunter's lay, and we will join in the chorus,' said the son of Graf Eberstein, and Ulrich nodded assent.

'Have these songs reached your ears, father, or do they not pierce through cloister walls?' said the Duke, as the ringing notes died away.

'Go where one will, they are known and sung, my lord.'

'Aye, these many years past, yet no one, save indeed this squire of mine, has any guess who their maker is, and Hildemund will tell nought; no, not to pleasure his liege lord.'

Hildemund shook his head, smiling, and laid a finger on his lips.

'Well, one more lay. Give us that one, so strangely sad and sweet, that it might make a man's eyes wet, and he need feel no shame—"The swallows flit round the Marienstein."'

'Yes, yes, there is none sweeter,' cried several voices.

Hildemund chanced to look at the monk as Ulrich spoke, and saw him start violently; his pale face flushed, and his eyes glowed as he turned them on the singer, so that they almost seemed to scorch like live coals. It was as if he had suddenly seized a long sought clue.

'Why, wherefore delay thus? What is amiss?' asked the Duke, surprised by Hildemund's sudden pause and change of countenance; 'art weary?'

'No, my lord,' answered Hildemund, collecting himself, but not with much success.

'Thou hast not done thyself or the song justice,'

observed Ulrich, as the tender, wistful air came to an end. 'Thou art tired; I knew not how late it was. We must hold council again what order to take. . . . Max, I have need of thee. Good-night, my lords and ladies. Father, my good lord of Eberstein will guide you to your chamber.'

'Nay, my lord, if this young squire will be my guide it suffices,' said the monk, and Ulrich noted something forced and strange in his voice, though the emotion which his face had betrayed was but momentary.

'Be it so. Hildemund, see that our worthy guest be duly cared for. Come, my Max.'

The Duke left the hall leaning on the shoulder of his oldest and trustiest follower, who said with his usual gruff freedom:

'Can we trust yon shaven crown, my lord?'

'Aye; it is for his interest to play us fair. Max, my good star must have moved Ferdinand of Austria to meddle with the privileges of the clergy in my duchy! The tide has turned at last.'

He spoke with proud confident triumph, as one who felt himself again master.

'I think so too, my lord.'

'I know it, good friend, and here is the proof. The lynx of whom we wot, who has climbed from height to height until his son is among the favoured at the Emperor's court, yet sees it well after plotting and planning my ruin all these years, to whisper in all secrecy the scheme concerning my son unto the monks, that it may be borne unto mine ear. What think you of that? He must tremble sore for his Würtemberger lands, methinks. Now, if I fail once more, he has Court favour, and if I regain my duchy, he has laid me under a debt unto him. Is it not well devised? Aye, truly, the tide has turned, and I am as glad for the sakes of my true and faithful followers as mine own. We have gone through many a storm of ill-fortune snoulder to shoulder, Max! But I would I could see my way as to the boy Christopher. Saved he

must be, yet I like ill to risk Hildemund Dahn, who is well-nigh as dear as a son to me. All these years he has cheered my sad hours, and believed in better times, and asked nothing but to be near me, and for guerdon I risk his life.'

'In a good cause, my lord, and what could any ask more?'

'If he do this thing and return with my son, I will knight him before I embrace my own boy,' said Ulrich, with something of his old impetuosity. 'Eberstein doubtless will accompany him and move the peasants of Grünau to aid in the having away of Christopher.'

'Will they do it, my lord?—the Tyrolese are ever loyal to Austria,' said Max.

'Here is Eberstein himself—answer that, you who know the people, Graf,' said Ulrich.

'Loyal they are, but I can answer for some that they love me better than Charles,' replied Eberstein. 'One way or another I can compass the flight if only the Prince be warned and willing, and therein Hildemund must play his part.'

'Think you he will get the chance at St. Willibald?'

'The monk will see to that,' said Ulrich; and so well known was the rapid communication and unanimous action among convents of the same order, so intangible and vast the power that the ecclesiastical body thus wielded, that there was no doubt that, if they chose to forward an interview between Hildemund and the Prince, means would certainly be found, without a shadow of suspicion falling on anyone concerned.

Hildemund had accompanied Father Arnolph, who put aside all offers of service with a hasty sternness which disconcerted him, though the look which he had surprised had prepared him for something strange.

'Young man, answer me as your soul is dear to you,' he said, grasping Hildemund's arm, and looking into his face. 'Whence had you that lay of the Marienstein?'

'From him who made it.'

'I knew it. He lives then yet,' said Father Arnolph, catching his breath, while a look which might have been exceeding joy or exceeding pain, or both together, flashed across his countenance. You need not tell me his name—he made and sang it himself as a boy dwelling at Marienstein—he is Ulfric von Lichtenberg.'

'Ulfric . . . von Lichtenberg! Is that his name? How do you know this, father? Do you know too that he is——'

'A leper! Aye, indeed, I know it right well,' said the monk, with a laugh so strange that Hildemund drew back, believing he had to do with one insane, though he knew the next instant that this could hardly be. 'Where is this leper?'

'I may not tell you. How can I tell that Ulfric would have me name his hiding-place?'

'His hiding-place! Aye, he has indeed hidden himself but too well, since never could I learn aught of him.'

'He has ever shrunk from the eye of man, and could more easily starve than accept a dole. I guessed him a clerk, and perhaps noble, but—a Lichtenberg!'

Hildemund could not master his astonishment and wonder. 'Lichtenberg!' he repeated.

'Even so, the nephew of Graf Ruprecht, who holds his lands and revenues. The elder nephew fell in battle—in an evil day for the younger, who else perchance had not been now—a leper.'

'I understand you not, father.'

'I know that, young sir,' answered the monk, in the same scoffing and enigmatical tone. 'It would seem you did not disdain this wretched outcast?'

'Outcast and leper though he be, never did a gentler or nobler spirit dwell in any breast.'

'Therein you speak truly. Would you have thought that any could be found who for gold would hurl him from a fair and honoured life into such a gulf of misery as a man would scarce wish to his mortal foe? Would you have thought so, I ask you?'

'I know of one who would, if he gained thereby.'

'So! You guess the tale?' said the monk, astonished.

'Nay, I only know that Graf Lichtenberg would rejoice at aught which gave him wealth and power—aye, were it spear or poison.'

'Graf Lichtenberg! I deemed you meant another—aye, he is ever ready to move ill deeds, and make others his instruments. The evil one himself is scarcely a more subtle tempter. But this concerns you not. Tell me, I say again, where to find Ulfric. Evil was the day for him and me that we met; long years have I spent since in prayer and penance, and found no rest, no, nor ever shall until Ulfric has heard and pardoned all. Pardoned! If indeed he can, then I shall believe that Heaven has mercy even for me.'

He spoke with a passion the more intense for being suppressed.

'I cannot tell you—I may not, without the leave of Ulfric. Nay, hear me! Herr Basil, Pfarrer of Ilzthal, will know if it be well you have speech of him. Ask me no more, it touches my honour to betray Ulfric's secret.'

'Young fool! you know not what you do in thus hindering me,' said the monk gloomily. 'Not for me only, though it be no light thing to hinder a sinner from cleansing his soul, but Ulfric—Ulfric, mark you—would pay for the tale I have to tell with his heart's blood.'

Hildemund stood in great perplexity. 'If I live to return from the errand on which I am bound I will seek him and tell him what you have said, unless indeed you will seek Herr Basil without delay.'

'I may not go to Ilzthal nor anywhere without consent of my superior,' said Father Arnolph, the fire dying out of his eyes, and a deep despondency spreading itself over his countenance, as he suddenly recollected he was not a free agent. 'I had forgotten—all seemed gone from me but that dark past. I know not if I shall gain permission or not.'

'How! when it is to confess a sin and ease a burdened soul?'

'Oh, young sir! do you think we religious count such matters so weighty? I counsel you not to see the cloister as closely as I have done. I entered it to atone for a great sin and work out my salvation; and it was soon found I had a keen wit and knew men, and could serve the Church, and I have done so, but as for my soul .... Go to Ilzthal! A private errand to right a wrong black as hell, to ask pardon of one foully wronged, is of small matter; were it to forward the interests of our order, or our monastery, it would be done right speedily.'

There was a pause. 'To come so near and be baffled!' he muttered; then aloud—'What like is that Pfarrer of whom you spoke?'

The tones were touched with the ingrained contempt of the monk for the secular priest.

'The best man I ever knew,' answered Hildemund, warmly.

'Ah!' The intonation of disdain was unmistakable, and Hildemund resented it. 'Yes, the purest and the best—a man who could not harbour a foul or mean thought, and who, if he erred, would err out of goodness rather than any fault.'

'And so would do the more harm,' said Father Arnolph.

'Never saw I one like him, except indeed my mother,' said Hildemund, eye and voice softening as he spoke that beloved name. 'When he speaks of our dear Lord and the world unseen it is as if he were a traveller who told of a country seen with his own eyes, and the king of which he knew well, and one must needs believe all he says because he knows the truth thereof so well.'

'Ah!' said the monk again, but in another tone.

'I would I could see him again!' Hildemund continued, stirred by the thoughts of his old home and those there. 'And I shall when I do your errand.'

'Aye—when!' said the monk.

It did not strike Hildemund that he doubted whether he would ever return from his perilous undertaking. 'Only tell me what to say,' he added.

'If thou dost do mine errand, say that he who in the world was Thomas Knades the leech. . . . No, I must tell the tale myself. If I can but incline the Duke to grant what we ask . . . . Surely he must see how his own hopes rest on the support of the clergy!'

'The Duke will not yield more than he sees good either for threat or promise,' said Hildemund. 'He knows when to give way and when to stand fast.'

'Aye, he has learned that lesson. I saw it while we talked together, and I laid before him the offers and demands wherewith I am charged. The hasty youth who twice threw away his throne has grown into a noble man. It is the father whom Würtemberg needs, not the son. I say it not to flatter Ulrich's ear, as you deem,' he added, with a low scoffing laugh. 'As I noted a while ago, you have not learned the first art of courts, or your looks would not so readily betray you. What! a blush! never saw I courtier blush before! Fie! 'tis a girl's trick!'

'I am no courtier,' said Hildemund, angry at feeling his colour rise more and more at the gibing tone, and wondering whether this could be the same man who had but now stood before him in an agony of remorse.

'Therein you are right, for a courtier must know how to stoop and flatter, and lie smoothly, and take rebuff and gibe sweetly, and make fair show of devotion to his lord, while all the while he schemes for his own advantage.'

'We know nought of such arts in Hohentwiel. We would not be scorned by Ulrich or by ourselves,' said Hildemund.

'And what does this banished Duke offer thus strongly to bind men to a losing cause?'

'He counts us as friends,' said the young man, a light kindling in his frank eyes. 'For those who know Duke Ulrich, this is meed enough.'

'Yet many paint him blacker than the foul fiend,' said the monk. 'Know you that? Is there no truth in certain tales, thou loyal squire?'

'I need not seek to hide what you must know right well; there are dark things in the Duke's past; let those who have none to repent cast stones at him,' said Hildemund, and saw, not without satisfaction, that the thrust made Father Arnolph wince and frown; 'but he has nobly redeemed them; where would you now find a more gallant and goodly prince in all Germany? It seems to me that one who has greatly fallen, yet had the strength to rise and go forward, though clogged by his deed, and knowing that for all his sorrow he can never undo it, is nobler than he who being little tempted hath never fallen.'

'Deem you so?' said the monk, with startled eagerness; but the next instant he added, in the scoffing tone which had already angered Hildemund, 'You should be a clerk, fair sir; such a ready tongue and fair face would surely lead to high preferment and favour. What! you mislike my harmless jest? Now who would have thought you so hot? Well, I want but to be left in peace. Fair dreams to you; get to your pillow, and I will to prayer.'

Hildemund went away angry and astounded. He could hardly yet grasp the fact that the leper of the Eschthal was Graf Lichtenberg's nephew, Rosilde's cousin. Dornröschen! The leper's blood flowed in her veins too; one day that fatal taint might show itself in her as well as him. He knew not whence the thought came, and recoiled from it as if it were sacrilege, but it returned, and filled him with a passion of tenderness and fear. He felt as if he must seek her, and take her in his arms and protect her from this and all else which could threaten her. The thought of her in her sweet maidenhood, no longer a child, yet meeting him with the fearless, childish affection which had deepened with each year possessed him. He knew then what he had never consciously realised before, that come what might, Dornröschen was dearer to him than all the world besides—nay, that if he saw her, like Ulfric von Lichtenberg, an outcast, abhorred by all others, she would be, not less, but if this were possible, more dear to him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MANY plans had been discussed and rejected at Hohentwiel before Hildemund took his way to Tyrol, accompanied by Graf Eberstein, who undertook to furnish means of escape, were Prince Christopher once out of the hands of his guard, if but for half an hour. He could count on ready and unquestioning aid from the family who had looked on him through his early childhood as brother and son, and with whom, during later years, when on visits to his kindred in Tyrol, he had kept up affectionate intercourse; but the difficulty remained how to convey to the young Prince a warning of his danger, and intelligence that friends were at hand. This must be Hildemund's task. Hildemund could only trust to some happy chance, but he was one of those to whom such chances are apt to offer themselves, and his hopefulness sustained that of his much older and less sanguine companion. They turned their backs on the sparkling Zeller lake, and distant Bregenz, and made their way as rapidly as they could to the Italian borders so as to precede the Prince and his party, of whose movements Father Arnolph had seemed accurately informed. Graf Eberstein avoided the beaten track and all places where he was likely to meet with any of his friends or kindred, and conducted Hildemund to the house of his foster parents, hale old folks, who received him with rejoicing, and treated him as an equal, with a hearty frank affection which amused and delighted Hildemund, accustomed as he was to view him as one of the gravest and most high-born of the nobles at Hohentwiel. Eberstein himself seemed another man in this mountain home; he looked ten years younger, Hildemund thought, and jested and laughed with his old foster parents and their sons and daughters as if he had no cares or anxieties weighing him down. Hildemund was cordially received as his companion, and the motive of their coming was discussed without reserve.

To these Tyrolese, devout, but passionate lovers of freedom, the plot to entrap the young Prince into a cloister appeared monstrous; to a man they were all ready to defeat it. From them Hildemund learned that the annual fair at Grünau would take place on the day on which it was probable the troop would pass through the little town, and though this made it difficult for a fugitive to steal away unnoticed, on the other hand, the bustle and stir and the number of strangers flocking to the valley might favour escape. All travellers from St. Willibald were sure to make Grünau their halting-place, before undertaking the next long and difficult stage, and there, if anywhere, the attempt must be made.

'The monk's garb would cover the knight's, so that none could guess at what it conceals,' said Seppi, the youngest of the brothers, who had thrown himself heart and soul into the discussion.

''Twere not hard to cast it round him unseen in some dark corner of the church,' suggested another, 'and then he might pass forth unmarked by any, and in half an hour we would have him out of reach of all his foes.'

'Said I not so?' said Eberstein, turning to Hildemund.

'That half hour must be gained,' said Hildemund resolutely, and he put on the gleeman's dress, which hitherto he had not needed to assume, and with his zither took his way towards St. Willibald, guided by Seppi, until the abbey came in sight, standing amid its meadows and orchards, under the great mountains clothed with pine woods, above which the snowy peaks raised their noble heads. Like Sanct Anna, this was one of those abbeys where the monks were more grandly lodged than many a prince. It had manifold outside interests; its inhabitants were busy men of the world, mixing in politics, and trading with the numerous merchants who came to buy the produce of their fields and flocks. Its prelate had his banqueting and audience halls like a prince, and kept all but regal state. Many a large subsidy had Charles V. had from St. Willibald, and many of his soldiers were serfs from the abbey

lands, but his demands had become more and more peremptory as they grew heavier, and the prelate had taken counsel with his chapter and with other convents of his order how a check might be found for the ever-growing power of Hapsburg. That Archduke Ferdinand was following in his brother's steps, and levying heavy toll on the convents of Würtemberg strengthened the resolve of the order that Austria should annex no more states to her dominions.

Hildemund lingered until he saw the little troop approaching the abbey gates; and let them overtake and pass him, as he sat by the wayside, touching his zither, beside a fountain where a clear streamlet poured into a stone basin from a wooden spout, above which stood a carved figure of St. Willibald. The leader of the party was a noble, past middle age, with grizzled hair and beard, doubtless Graf Redwitz, and beside him rode a youth whose fair locks and gallant bearing marked him out as Duke Ulrich's son. Hildemund's heart beat quickly at the sight of him. He was conversing gaily with Graf Redwitz, and glancing round as if all the novel sights and sounds were full of enjoyment to him; for the first time he had the sense of freedom, and no longer felt himself within a gilded cage. There was something deeply pathetic in his joyous unconsciousness of the secret aim in this journey. He noted Hildemund, and smiled, throwing him a silver piece, as he held up his zither and looked supplicatingly at him. Some half dozen gentlemen followed, among whom Hildemund instantly recognised Wolfgang von Lichtenberg, not only by the black and white plume and scarf which were the colours of his house, but by the round dark eyes under straight thick brows, and the sullen and dogged expression of countenance. Except that years had changed the boy into a man, Wolfgang was little altered. Hildemund hoped that he himself was less easily identified. He had said nothing to anyone of the special danger which he knew would threaten him when he heard that Wolfgang would be of the party, but he was well aware of it. Wolfgang would not forget a

grudge, and if he recognised Hildemund he would assuredly find means to gratify it. Hildemund saw his eyes turn upon him, but there was no recognition in their haughty gaze. He had not his father's unerring eyes for a face once beheld. Graf Lichtenberg would have seen through Hildemund's disguise in an instant, but the slow mind of Wolfgang had not realised that the years which had made himself into a man had done as much for his boy enemy, whom he still thought of as the slim lad who withstood him in the castle hall of Burgstein. Attendants followed with pack horses, and a number of men-at-arms completed the troop. They rode slowly, as if their horses were tired, and Hildemund reached the abbey gates almost as soon as they, well pleased both at having attracted the Prince's attention, and at having encountered the gaze of Wolfgang without rousing suspicion. Other wayfarers were asking admission, for the approaching fair at Grünau brought a great concourse of strangers to the valley, but Hildemund almost doubted, in spite of Father Arnolph's assurance, whether one of the humble and despised caste of gleemen would be admitted into those stately precincts, but to his request for a night's lodging the porter answered, 'Though indeed we seldom house thy craft, yet our lord abbot has bidden to-day and to-morrow admit all who crave hospitality, so they will promise to pray for the soul of our reverend sub-prior, now at point of death. Enter then, and pray to Our Lady and St. Willibald for his peace. Yonder, on the right, is the hospitium.'

Hildemund entered accordingly. He could not but connect this order as much with what Father Arnolph had said as with the condition of the sub-prior, and he felt sure that some opportunity would offer unsuspected for his communication to Prince Christopher. Many guests were in the hospitium, though none of any high degree; these were housed elsewhere, but presently the attendants of Graf Redwitz's party appeared, and he listened closely to all they said, though putting himself as little forward as possible. He learned but one thing

of importance, namely, that, as he had hoped, they would halt at Grünau for a couple of hours before pursuing their way over the Brenner pass. The next morning then would be the critical time.

As in duty bound all in the hospitium attended vespers, and so did the young Prince and his party, to whom the abbot afterwards showed the treasures in the sacristy, the gold and silver vessels, the costly vestments, the great illuminated missals, and then pointed out all which was noteworthy in the church itself. Hildemund durst not venture into the sacristy, but he lingered before the altar of St. Willibald, in hopes of a word unnoticed with the Prince, and observed with what quick interest he listened and questioned, and how gay and untroubled his air was. Not a shadow of suspicion could have crossed his mind. Graf Redwitz attended him, and showed all due readiness to admire and reverence, but was never out of earshot for a moment. Hildemund wondered whether he now mistrusted the abbot, or was always equally vigilant. In either case it augured ill. As they approached the chapel where Hildemund knelt, he rose and stood respectfully aside, and the abbot stopped, without even appearing to perceive his presence, and began pointing out the story of the patron saint of the monastery, told in the richly coloured panes overhead, and Hildemund reverently drew a little nearer and listened too. The young Prince smiled and said, 'Sure, 'tis the gleeman I saw near your gates by the roadside, reverend father. I had not deemed his craft so devout.'

'All who receive our hospitality to-day are bound to pray for Father Friedmund, our sub-prior, who lies at the point of death, as I have already told your highness,' said the abbot. 'It may be you would choose to hear him sing this evening? If so, he will be much honoured.'

Hildemund turned a bright and eager look towards the Prince, who, attracted by the frank and pleasant countenance of the young man so little his senior, answered smiling, 'Right willingly, my lord abbot.

Perchance it will be long ere I again hear a German lay. What say you, my lord of Redwitz? Were it not a pleasant way to spend an hour ere we go to our beds?'

'Surely, if it please your highness,' answered the Graf, who was desirous to show all deference to his charge until he had him safely within convent walls. 'Music is ever dear to your ear.'

'Methinks a gleeman must lead a merry life, and be welcome wherever he turns his steps,' said Christopher. 'Is it not so, young minstrel?'

'Yes, my lord, I have had many kind words from peasants and princes, in taverns or court, and many a token of goodwill,' said Hildemund, bringing the gold chain round his neck into view; 'here is one I am right proud of.'

It was the chain which Ulrich had given him at Sanct Anna. The abbot took the opportunity of the Prince's attention being occupied, to ask some confidential question of von Redwitz; he spoke so low that the Graf had to bend forward and listen attentively to hear it.

Christopher stooped down to see the chain closer, and Hildemund rapidly turned the golden medal which hung from it, and showed on the reverse side the three antlers which were the arms of Würtemberg. The blood flushed crimson in the cheeks of the young Prince; he looked a keen, sudden question, which Hildemund answered by a glance of warning, while he said aloud, 'If it please your highness to send for me by-and-bye I will sing my best, though I am but a poor zither-player, and no Meistersänger, like them of Nüremberg, whom all tongues praise so greatly.'

The Prince nodded, and turned to the abbot with a question about the relics contained in the church, and Hildemund saw that he had been understood. The self-control and readiness shown by Christopher gave him good hope for the future. He went gaily back to the hospitium, and exchanged a friendly sign with the eager faces crowded at the windows of the convent school, to watch the guests who flocked to the abbey on this stirring day, an annual holiday, in honour of a visit paid to the

abbey by Maximilian, the grandfather of Charles V., who granted the scholars a certain number of fishes and an extra holiday annually. They could not hope as much from the coming of Christopher of Würtemberg, but his arrival was an event in their monotonous life, and all the tonsured lads, destined for the priesthood from earliest years, or wilful scholars, who were to return by-and-bye to the world, were watching for a glimpse of him.

The banquet offered by Abbot Florian to his guests lasted long, and did not seem saddened by the illness of the sub-prior. Its luxury was tempered by strict decorum; this abbey knew nothing of the light and scandalous life too common in many, and the reader appeared, and gave all present an opportunity of being edified during good part of the meal. Only a limited number of the community were present; some were absent on business connected with the convent, others were serving the parishes dependent upon it. The stately order which was observed made more of the suite than Wolfgang find the time pass very slowly, though rich dishes and noble wine abounded, and when at length the Latin grace had concluded the meal, they awaited drearily enough the prospect of several more long hours spent in this reverend company. Something had been heard among them of the gleeman, and the hope of some variety in the grave tranquillity of the evening was highly welcome. More than one of the younger knights privately besought Prince Christopher to demand his presence. He signed assent readily, for though to one early ripened by misfortune and a life which was but a veiled captivity, the conversation between the two men, the one a keen statesman, like Graf Redwitz, and the other a deeply-read and cultivated priest like the prelate of St. Willibald, was full of interest, he had his reasons for seeing the gleeman again, and his mind was full of the question how to speak unnoticed with him. He could not doubt that this minstrel had come here expressly to meet him, sent either by that strange monk who had revealed so much to him a few months before, or perhaps by the father whose name no one ever spoke,

and whom he had not seen since early childhood. In spite of himself there was a preoccupied look on his countenance, though he had not been bred up at the Austrian court without acquiring that art of concealing his thoughts in which Father Arnolph had found Hildemund deficient. The abbot remarked it, and observed to Graf Redwitz in a lowered voice, 'My lord, our princely guest wearies of our grave talk, which indeed is not of his age. I would not that he thought of his sojourn among us as a tedious time. How were it if we conducted him over our library and schools? Yet there is much that I would say to you were these young ears but occupied. Think you indeed that the Holy Father——'

'We are overheard, my lord,' said Graf Redwitz hastily, and there was a moment's pause, amid which the distant notes of a zither were audible, and a voice singing.

''Tis the gleeman in the hospitium,' said the abbot; 'I marvel that Father Gabriel should permit it.'

'Nay, now I think of it, did not the Prince desire to hear him?' said Graf Redwitz, who was as desirous to continue the conversation as Abbot Florian could be. 'His voice and instrument might while away an hour pleasantly enough, if it pleased you to allow his presence.'

The abbot hesitated a moment, then gave permission, and Hildemund was summoned, amid the unconcealed satisfaction of all the younger party. Abbot Florian was quite sincere in saying he wished for a private conversation with Graf Redwitz, who could boast of being deeper in the Emperor's confidence than anyone else, and was well able to judge what the policy of Charles V. was likely to be towards the Holy See. On the other hand, von Redwitz was anxious to ascertain what support the great Benedictine houses in Austria were likely to lend the Emperor in the vexed question of the relations between the house of Hapsburg and Rome. The conversation continued in a key inaudible to any but the two immediately concerned, while Hildemund, bowing low, awaited the Prince's commands. His early

wanderings about Thuringia had brought him in contact many a time with such vagrant minstrels as those whose part he had assumed, and he answered the careless questions of the young nobles with readiness. No suspicion was aroused, though Wolfgang stared hard at him with a heavy, perplexed air, as if some recollection were stirring in his mind, but the effort to grasp it was vain, and he turned away indifferently, Hildemund was not sorry to remember that he did not know one tune from another, and probably had never deigned to listen to his songs for five minutes, even if he so much as knew that the Bannwart's son had a voice at all.

He sang again and again, and the group around him became more numerous, attracted by his clear voice and skilful handling of his zither. Although Graf Redwitz had during the course of the journey relaxed something of his first vigilance, as he became assured of the Prince's entire unsuspiciousness, he now glanced repeatedly towards him, for this was the first time that any stranger had been allowed to approach him, but assured that nothing private was passing amid so many bystanders, he gave himself up to the interest of the conversation between himself and the abbot.

Both the Prince and Hildemund were occupied with the same thought; time was passing, and no word could be exchanged unheard. Unawares, one of the young nobles standing by came to their aid.

'This is the first time I ever saw a zither close,' he said; 'it should need small skill to deal with so rustical an instrument.'

'Think you so, my lord?' said Hildemund, smiling. 'Will it please you try?'

The result of the attempt called forth a shout of laughter amid his companions, and one and another jestingly took the zither, and handled it with the same ill success. The abbot and von Redwitz looked round, and smiled to hear the laughter.

'Would your highness honour my poor instrument also?' said Hildemund. 'Methinks you would find it more docile.'

'I fear it is less likely to flatter me than its master,' said Christopher, with a smile, and look and tone so strongly recalled his father that Hildemund could not forbear a bright, pleased glance into his face as he said, 'If you would allow me to show you how to handle the instrument, my lord; see, you must slip on this thumb ring, and use it thus. Permit me to show you—see, not so, but thus.'

He put his hand upon that of the prince, and Christopher felt a small roll slid into his fingers.

'Nay, my lords,' he said, looking up laughingly at the bystanders, 'give back a little, I pray you, or I shall fail for very shamefacedness. This rustical instrument, as Bernhard there calls it, is more hard to deal with than any lute or viol. I can make nought of it; a cat miscalling his rival by night gives forth sounds as sweet. The thing is sure bewitched!'

He pushed the zither back to Hildemund amid general mirth and jesting, and throwing him a gold piece, turned away as if weary of the amusement. That he would find means to read the warning conveyed to him, Hildemund did not doubt, and that he would act on it without hesitation, he hoped and believed. Although he took no further notice of Hildemund, he stood within hearing while one of the party asked whither the gleeman was going, and Hildemund ventured a meaning glance as he answered that he should attend the fair at Grünau, and hoped to have good success there.

Since he had seen the noble youth whom the pitiless policy of Charles V. had condemned to a cloister, and who was going so gaily and unsuspectingly to his doom, Hildemund was doubly resolved to save him at all costs. With earliest dawn he left the monastery, and made his way to Grünau, meeting one of Graf Eberstein's foster brothers on the road, and sending him back to say that so far all went well. Early as the hour was, throngs of travellers beside Hildemund were on the road, and the holiday attire from many districts showed

that the wake of St. Willibald was a great event. The fair green valley, with its smiling pastures, and its background of snowy mountains with ice-fields in their laps, was gay with women in velvet bodices, broad hats or fur caps, and blue aprons over darker skirts, and men in much gayer attire, their red waistcoats contrasting with brown jackets and embroidered belts, and little plumes and gold tassels adorning their tall pointed hats. Hildemund noted what a fair, tall, fearless race they were. Elsewhere he had seen deep traces of the misery caused to high and low by the peasant war yet lingering, but it had hardly touched this valley, where serfdom was mild or unknown to the greater number of the inhabitants, who had never been ground down like the Thuringians and Franconians. Kindly glances and salutations were cast to Hildemund as he passed, for these were a people passionately fond of song and dance, and a gleeman was highly welcome at such a time as this.

The little village came in sight, the green-tiled tower of the church brighter than any meadow, while its little roof looked as if a broad-brimmed hat had been clapped down on its head. The clear stream which had accompanied Hildemund for several miles was here spanned by a bridge, whose warder was exchanging greeting and jest with the passers-by. Booths had been erected round the church, and their owners were busily setting out their wares, with a little crowd of villagers looking on. Customers were flocking in and out of the village inn, which had for its sign St. Florian pouring a pail of water on a burning house, and a rude couplet in the local dialect, declaring 'Home and goods trust I to Florian's name. Should he not keep it, his be the shame.' The bells called to prayer, as they had done ever since four that morning; the hum of many voices floated on the air; friends and relations from distant homes met and greeted each other; new-comers kept appearing, sunlight bathed the fresh sweet meadows, and the mountain slopes, and the glaciers far overhead, and little mists, which had lost their way in the pinewoods, went

curling and floating upward, and melted away and vanished.

Hildemund was still too young and of too fresh and buoyant a nature not to enjoy the busy, animated scene, though he knew the moment was as critical for himself as for the Prince, and wondered more and more how Christopher was to escape unnoticed from such a crowd, who doubtless would all have their eyes upon him. Hildemund did not know that nobles and princes had no especial interest in the eyes of the Tyrolese, natural democrats, though admirably loyal, and that just then they cared more for their annual holiday than for anything or anyone outside of it.

While Hildemund looked round him, and calculated the chances of success, Prince Christopher was doing the same, with at least equal anxiety. With the first ray of daylight, while his companions slept, he had drawn forth and studied the little scroll. His pulses quickened as he saw it was signed by the father whose history had been so studiously kept from him, until Arnolph's revelation broke upon him. He could not have told whether the thought came unbidden, or if the monk had suggested it, but thenceforward he had resolved to escape from a captivity which, however disguised, was odious to him. He had welcomed this journey as partial freedom; he learned that it was the path to life-long imprisonment.

No directions as to the method of flight could be given; for these he must trust to mother wit and fortunate chance, but he guessed that the attempt must be made at Grünau.

'My lord abbot,' he said, as he took leave of the prelate; 'I would I could have attended High Mass in this stately temple of yours, the more that to-day, Graf Redwitz tells me, we quit the soil of the fatherland. But since it may not be, farewell; I will hear Mass once more in Germany at Grünau.'

'You will do well, my son,' said the abbot, and they mounted and rode out of the abbey gates.

It was still early when they came to Grünau, and

Graf Redwitz hesitated whether or not to push on further. 'It were better we rode forward,' he said, beckoning to one of the guides who accompanied the party. Christopher sat silent on his horse, looking on the gay and lively scene. He caught sight of Hildemund, standing near the church door, and playing on his zither, and then he looked to the mountains, with a wild longing to escape thither, and a cruel sense of helplessness.

'Well, then, since the next stage is so long, we had best feed the horses here,' said Graf Redwitz at last, as he threw his rein to an attendant.

'Then will I keep my promise to the good abbot of St. Willibald,' said Christopher. 'My lord, while you give such orders as you see fit, I will hear Mass.'

'Do so, if it please your highness, and Junker Wolfgang and Bernard von Grumbach will attend you,' said the Graf, turning to enter the little inn, where the crowd of guests left little room for his party, and small attention was shown when his name and rank were announced to the host, who evidently wished this distinguished party miles away, instead of calling for especial attention when all the world wanted food and drink at once on the busiest day of the whole year.

'Your highness is in time to see the picture of St. Gundula unveiled,' said Hildemund, as the Prince came up with the young men deputed to attend him. It is shown once a year to the pious, and miracles are worked by it.'

'Aye, so? I am well pleased to have come at such a time,' said Christopher, feeling this a good omen. 'There is a prayer I would fain the holy martyr granted me.'

'We shall scarce be able so much as to enter the vestibule,' said Bernard von Grumbach, a handsome young courtier, who looked at the throng crowding to the door of the church with dainty disgust. 'Pah! my lord, the very smell of these unsavoury churls turns my stomach.'

'Well, stay without then,' laughed the Prince. 'Buy

thee a blessed medal, or the history of the holy saint at yonder stall, where the merchant has a fair blue-eyed daughter; that is more to thy taste than telling thy beads.'

'Fie, my lord, a peasant wench! Yet I will profit by your gracious permission,' answered the young noble; 'the eyes are blue indeed, and may merit a nearer look.'

'And you, Junker Wolfgang,' said Christopher, longing to be rid of him also, but Wolfgang was not so easily to be shaken off.'

'I would see the wonder-working picture, my lord,' he said, with a perception that the Prince wished to avoid his company.

'Then buy a blessed taper for us both, while I enter,' said Christopher, pointing to a stall close by, where consecrated candles, rosaries, crucifixes and the like accompaniments of an occasion such as this were displayed.

Wolfgang turned to do so, and the Prince advanced to the vestibule of the church, crowded with worshippers standing and kneeling, while the space beyond was densely filled.

'Is there room for one more worshipper, sorely in need to pray the holy saint's help?' said Christopher, as he stood opposite the door in the screen which divided this outermost part of the building from the interior.

'Aye, sir,' was the answer, and the speaker moved slightly, and allowed him to pass within. Standing thus against the screen he had the whole congregation before him, closely packed in the ancient, dark oaken seats, and blocking up the nave and aisles. High Mass was almost over, and all faces turned with reverent devotion towards the altar at the east end. No one had a thought to waste on Christopher, and he too bent his head and prayed earnestly. When he looked up he saw that Hildemund was standing beside him, and a little knot of tall peasants immediately around, who Hildemund whispered were friends. 'Your mantle, my lord,'

Hildemund added; 'now throw this over you, and make your way with Seppi as the crowd presses on after Mass to see the picture and hear the preacher discourse of it. See! by yonder little side door.'

It was with visible reluctance that the Prince assumed the monk's robe, rapidly flung about him. No one had seen the change of garb, no one was thinking of what passed in a remote and dark part of the church, the least envied position, except those in the secret, for the foster brothers of Graf Eberstein had friends and kindred in Grünau who could be trusted at any pinch.

Wolfgang had elbowed his way as far as the door in the screen, but could get no further, and stood there furious to find the crowd move no more for his commands and maledictions than one of their own rocks might have done. He paid small heed as to whether he hurt woman or child, and more than one shriek arose, but he could not advance a step.

'You shall rue this, you saucy churls!' he exclaimed, but no one heeded him; the most solemn moment in the service was at hand, and a deep hush of reverence and awe absorbed the crowd. Not without a certain sense of religion, Wolfgang could not help being impressed, and stood quietly where he was until the preacher mounted the pulpit near the high altar, and unveiled the miraculous picture, the fame of which attracted annual crowds to Grünau. Close-packed as the crowd was, the eagerness to see and approach made all move a little forward, and Wolfgang could enter the interior of the building. At first he forgot all about Prince Christopher, in his curiosity about the likéness of St. Gundula, a work of early art so dark and indistinct that it had to be taken altogether on trust. When the discourse, which related her history and her miracles ended, there was a general movement; many left the church, others knelt at the various altars, especially that of the martyr of the day; a great number crowded to the confessionals. Wolfgang had looked several times for Christopher, but could see

nothing of him. Now, at last, he caught sight of the green mantle at the further end of the church, near a confessional; doubtless the Prince was awaiting his turn. Wolfgang began to think of dinner, and wonder how long the Prince's devotions would continue. His companion now joined him, and after a short prayer he looked round and said, 'How much longer tarry you here? Where is the Prince? Graf Redwitz bids me come and dine; he has waited a good half hour.'

'I was even now thinking of that very thing,' said Wolfgang, 'but the Prince was waiting his turn at yonder confessional.'

'But where then is he?'

'He rose but now, and passed behind the altar; he is praying at some shrine, I take it. I saw his green mantle just now.'

The church was still very full, and they advanced slowly through the groups kneeling and standing about, looking for the Prince.

'He must have left the church while we passed behind the altar,' said von Grumbach, perplexed; 'come on, Graf Redwitz will be ill-pleased. He loves not to wait for any man.'

They hastened to the inn, where the Graf awaited them in considerable impatience.'

'Know you not how late it grows?' he exclaimed as they entered; 'where is the Prince?'

'Is he not here, my lord?'

'Here! no, else I had not asked you where he tarried. Wherefore did you leave him?'

'My lord, the unmannerly churls closed in and barred my way,' said Wolfgang; 'these saucy knaves need a lesson which I hope you will read them.'

'You did ill to let the Prince out of sight,' said Graf Redwitz with angry displeasure. 'Go, seek him. Nay, I will go myself.'

He went, but the search was vain. Prince Christopher was not in the church, and no inquiries elicited any information, except that a 'green mantle' had been seen not many minutes earlier at a confessional.

Graf Redwitz was beside himself with alarm and wrath. 'To the bridge!' he cried; 'if he were here so lately he cannot have crossed it; question the bridgeward; let none pass unmarked. You, Hohenburg, ride up the other road out of the valley. I hold every man in this throng answerable to my Lord the Emperor if he escape. Hark you, Junker, tell me again how it chanced that you were parted from him. Von Grumbach, summon the Amptmann of Grünau, and tell him he must answer it if the Prince of Würtemberg get hence.' Before Wolfgang had repeated his story, from which the Graf gathered only that the church had been thronged, and that the sturdy Tyrolese would not yield to his boyish insolence, the Amptmann had arrived. Graf Redwitz turned menacingly upon him. 'There is treachery, Herr Amptmann. The Prince of Würtemberg has gotten away secretly, a thing not possible save by aid of some here.'

The Amptmann shrugged his broad shoulders. 'Sir Graf, I for one knew not that he was in your company, any more than I know wherefore he flees it,' he answered. 'What is Würtemberg to us? Waste no threats on me, for we are free folk, who will not brook them.'

'Dogs of peasants!' muttered the Graf, while he looked anxiously around to see if any of his messengers were returning, but he knew how high was the spirit of these mountaineers, and how fearful Charles V. was of rousing discontent among a border folk whose loyalty was so important, and, smoothing his brow, he said, 'Nay, I spoke over hastily; the true Tyrol folk would lend no hand to treachery against their noble lord, and therefore I look to you, good Amptmann, for help in this matter. Plain it is that the Prince cannot have stolen away, and none know thereof; but there are many strangers here to-day, and among them doubtless men from Bavaria or Würtemberg. He cannot yet be far. What say you it were well to do? Counsel me what order to take.'

'I will at once have proclamation made that none, under pain of treason, meddle in this matter, and that

they tell all they know, and lend aid to your men, noble sir,' answered the Amptmann, appeased. 'Here, Niklas, blow the horn to call all hither.'

They were standing outside the inn, and a crowd had already gathered; the bray of the horn brought double the number in a few minutes. The Amptmann related in a few words what had occurred, and bade all who had anything to tell speak freely. Graf Redwitz had suggested offering a large reward, but this the Amptmann had put aside with some displeasure.

'We are not used to take payment for speaking truth,' he had replied.

Little was learned, however. A herdsman declared that he had seen the Prince without his mantle; another asserted that this was impossible, as he had marked him wrapped in it while listening to the sermon. Wolfgang broke into the conflicting and contradictory evidence by repeating that he had seen him kneeling near the confessional not ten minutes before von Grumbach joined him. Several voices confirmed the assertion, declaring that they had waited until the green mantle rose before they took their turn.

'Spake he to any?' asked von Redwitz, whose face grew each moment darker and more troubled.

No one could answer this, until von Grumbach, who felt himself in high disgrace, and was eager to atone for his neglect, exclaimed, 'Yes, my lord—or rather I would say, that gleeman who sang last night at St. Willibald spoke somewhat to the Prince without the church, and entered close behind him.'

'I would see that gleeman. Is he here?' asked Graf Redwitz.

'Aye, my lord! My lord, here is the green mantle,' exclaimed many voices all together, and Graf Redwitz looked eagerly round, but instead of the Prince he only saw the mantle handed over the heads of the crowd in one quarter, and Hildemund put forward by a dozen eager hands in another.

'Where was the cloak found?' he asked, deeply disappointed.

'Folded within the chapel of St. Gundula,' cried several voices.

'The plot thickens,' muttered von Redwitz, looking from the mantle to Hildemund, who stood before him with a quiet, expectant air. 'Fellow! what do you know of the Prince?'

'Little enough, my lord. I stood by him for awhile, and then lost sight of him when we all sought to press round the pulpit and see the holy picture.'

'Which way went he?'

'Towards the north door, my lord, but I saw him not again.'

'You lie, sirrah! he was seen later at the confessional at the other end of the church.'

'I only said I saw him no more, noble sir.'

There was a movement of eager expectation in the crowd, and the Graf half rose, as one of his messengers came hurrying back, breathless.

'Well!' he exclaimed.

'My lord,' he panted, 'the bridge warden says none like unto the Prince has passed unless a young monk, or one who wore a monk's dress; he noted him, because he had not seen him come by in the morning.'

'Pshaw! he and many here came from the southern end of the valley.'

'Yes, my lord, but the wind took his cowl, and though he pulled it forward in haste, the warden marked his long fair hair, and thought it passing strange that a monk should own such locks.'

''Twas the Prince! 'twas Christopher!' exclaimed Graf Redwitz. 'Was he alone?'

'No, my lord, others were crossing the bridge each way at the time, and the warden marked not whether he spoke to any.'

'After him! Make speed for your lives! A monk's cowl . . . can the abbot——? I will back to the monastery; but 'tis vain, those who helped him hence will know how to hide him. How shall I face Charles?' muttered von Redwitz, in the deepest perplexity and alarm. 'A monk's garb! Amptmann, would you have

me believe he donned it unseen? Belike St. Gundula dropped it in his path, ha? I tell you there is foul treachery here.'

'A monk's garb is speedily donned, my lord,' said the Amptmann, much perturbed, 'and the church has dark corners, but help he must have had, and the thing was surely planned long ere to-day.'

'Aye, I noted he was changed yesterday. Hearken, gleeman, my mind misgives me thou hadst a hand in this; no stranger else has had speech of the Prince,' said von Redwitz, bending his eyes threateningly on Hildemund, who answered quietly, 'No word passed between us unheard, my lord; never had I speech of Prince Christopher in secret.'

'My lord, think you he wore the green mantle in place of the Prince?' asked Wolfgang, suddenly. 'I bethink me now that he who knelt at the confessional had no long locks, and was marvellous like this fellow.'

'Thought of somewhat late,' said von Redwitz, giving a penetrating look at Hildemund, whose face changed. 'So! his face tells a tale. Whence art thou, varlet?'

'A gleeman has no country, my lord,' answered Hildemund, sure that to name the Ilzthal would secure his destruction.

'What! is that thy answer? Konrad, string me up this knave to the inn sign yonder.'

'My lord, you will not take my life for so light a cause,' pleaded Hildemund, 'a matter that Junker Wolfgang cannot prove nor I disprove?'

'How know you his name so well?' asked von Redwitz, signing to his officials to wait.

'I have heard it, noble sir; that young lord spoke it but now.'

'Aye, so I did,' said von Grumbach, who had been greatly taken with Hildemund the evening before.

'My lord! my lord!' I know who he is!' exclaimed Wolfgang, who had been staring with knitted brows at Hildemund; 'I knew I had seen him before! A pestilent

fellow for whom a halter is too good; his name is Hildemund Dahn.'

'Is this so?' asked the Graf.

'Yes, my lord,' said Hildemund, resolutely. He had seen it would come, but more than the half hour had been gained, and the Prince must by now be out of reach.

'He does not deny it!' shouted Wolfgang, in triumph. 'String him up as my lord bade, Konrad.'

'Wherefore should I deny an honest name?' said Hildemund.

'Yet wert thou strangely slow to own thou knewst aught of the Junker,' said von Redwitz. 'What mystery is here? What do you know of the knave, Sir Wolfgang?'

'My lord, it is a saucy fellow whom I had chastised as he merits long ago, had he but crossed my path; but he shall not escape now,' said Wolfgang, all the savageness of his nature showing in look and voice.

'I know not how this bears on the matter of the Prince,' said von Redwitz, who, though he cared nothing for so slight a thing as whether a gleeman were hung or not, was very reluctant to lose the smallest chance of a clue. 'Speak, fellow.'

'Nay, my lord, if I must speak the truth, I wished not, as you may think, to be known of the Junker, and therefore, seeing he knew me not, I named not my birthplace, for when last we met we were at strife.'

'At strife! thou and a noble knight,' said von Redwitz, with contempt.

'He was not a knight then, my lord; we were both boys, and we fell out.'

'Wherefore?'

'About a Dompfaff,' said Hildemund, and in spite of his peril there was an arch laugh in his eyes. A great burst of mirth came from the crowd, and Graf Redwitz himself smiled grimly.

'There, my lord, said I not he was a saucy knave?' exclaimed Wolfgang.

'Was this all the cause of strife?' the Graf asked.

'Noble sir, he would not yield the bird at my bidding,' said Wolfgang, sullenly, looking at the laughing crowd with angry eyes.

'This should rather be a case for the spiritual than the secular courts,' observed the Amptmann, gravely; 'the ecclesiastics are ill pleased when laymen meddle with their matters.'

'Pshaw! this is no time for jesting,' said von Redwitz, impatiently; 'we waste time. Varlet gleeman, speak truth as you value your neck; whence and what are you?'

'My father was banner-bearer to Graf von Geyer, my lord; I am a free man, and dwell on Geyer'schen lands,' answered Hildemund.

'In Thuringia, then,' said the Graf considerably perplexed, for this seemed to snap all link between the gleeman and Würtemberg. 'Banner-bearer to Max von Geyer, and thou a gleeman!'

'My father died young, my lord, and I love song and zither.'

'I may not lose time thus,' said von Redwitz, impatiently; 'but I believe in my heart thou hast earned a short shrift and a noose.'

'Nay, noble sir,' cried a voice in the crowd, 'who shall then make music for us? A man can scarce sing with a halter round his neck. Give us the gleeman; no man shall be hung on the feast day of the valley.'

There was a great shout of assent, and Graf Redwitz, unwilling to displease those whose assistance in finding the fugitive he so greatly needed, answered:

'Be it so, then; get thee gone, sirrah, since nought is proved against thee. Nay, Sir Wolfgang, no more; if I do not hang him for mine own affairs, I scarce can for thine. Make not yourself a laughing-stock to the peasant pack,' he added, in a lowered tone of impatient anger, and Wolfgang drew back scowling, and casting a look on Hildemund which boded no good. The crowd received Hildemund into their midst with a tumult of laughter and rejoicing, and a voice said, at his ear, 'St. Willibald and St. Gundula be praised! I would

not have given a brass farthing for your neck ten minutes ago.'

He recognised Andreas, one of Graf Eberstein's foster brothers.

'If you had not spoken for me, I know not whether the noose were not round it now,' he answered. 'And——?'

Andreas answered the unspoken question with a nod of triumph. Graf Redwitz was again consulting with the Amptmann, and questioning some of the men who had returned from a vain search up one valley, but the throng were too indifferent to the escape of a fugitive, whose very name was unknown to them, to pay more attention to him. Hildemund was a far more important personage: fifty voices were calling for a song, and he must put aside all the feelings swelling in his heart, and lend himself to the humours of the day. A circle formed round him; and though his first notes were so husky and tremulous as to astonish and provoke himself, and cause a good-natured cry of 'He feels the noose about his neck! A cup of wine here to wash his throat,' his voice soon rose clear and full, as the sense of a great danger escaped, a desperate attempt successful, became uppermost in his mind, and filled him with glad exultation. The bystanders caught his mood, and joined with deep, ringing voices in the chorus of his song. 'Wir lieben, du liebest, sie lieben,' they sang joyously, snapping their fingers, and waving their tall hats in time to the music. They hardly looked round when the troop of Graf Redwitz rode back to St. Willibald, but Hildemund by-and-bye noted that a couple of men had been left behind, partly, he suspected, to keep an eye on his movements.

This altered his plans. Instead of joining the fugitives he saw he must make his way back to Hohentwiel alone, announcing his change of plan through Andreas, and he remained a day or two in the valley, to disarm suspicion. Andreas offered to conduct him by paths known only to chamois hunters, but he believed that the most open course was the

safest, and, finding that some of the traders who had come to the fair, were returning to Nüremberg, he asked leave to join them, as far as their ways lay together, letting it be known that he was returning to the Ilzthal. Consent was readily given, for one of the merchants was a lover of music, and Hildemund's voice pleased him well.

Hildemund was really going to the Ilzthal. He had a great longing to see Herr Basil, and he wanted to tell Ulfric the strange sayings of the monk who had called himself Thomas Knades. He could not but think that some dark and sinful story in the monk's past had driven him into the cloister, rather than any true vocation.

Now that the Prince had escaped, and that danger to himself gone by whose extent he had been so well aware of that he had fully believed he was making his last shrift at the confessional, he could think of little else than the tale which the monk had well-nigh told and then held back, saying it must be for no ear but that of Ulfric. Hildemund shrewdly suspected that this black story would prove to be intimately connected with Graf von Lichtenberg.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE passing years had brought few outward changes to Basil von Below. He had used no interest to procure his transfer to a larger and more public sphere of labour, but had, as at first, accepted his exile silently, and allowed himself to be forgotten, discouraging all offers from his family to urge his recall. Yet the isolation whose chill waters had benumbed him when first he came to the Ilzthal, had hardly lessened. Could he have felt his life one with that of his flock, he would have become deeply attached to his work. He shared their sufferings with an intensity none guessed, he burned at their wrongs with indignation the hotter that he was powerless against them. His unwearied efforts to

lighten the general misery after the destruction of the village had awakened some grateful wonder and affection, but when bondage again weighed down the peasantry, harder, heavier than ever, the old dull despair and suspicion of the upper classes sank like lead on the hearts of his flock, and he found himself again viewed as one of these hostile orders, not only better born than they, and therefore their natural enemy, but, being a priest, as one of those who introduced and upheld that Roman code which had replaced the old national laws, and to whose introduction they traced the extinction of the assemblies in which the Bauer could make his voice heard, and the gradual loss of one right after another. Here the Lutheran preachers had an advantage; they were known to heed little the dictates of canon law, and the people listened the more readily.

No words can describe the desolate disappointment of Herr Basil when he perceived that it was but for a short time that the hearts of his people had turned to him, and that, though he could influence and win men of his own class and among the burghers, he had not, never should have, the key of these which he longed so painfully to gain. A man infinitely less good, devout, tender, might have done tenfold more among them than he could. Here and there he touched one and another; his labour was not absolutely fruitless, as he believed, exaggerating in his discouragement his ill success, but on the whole there could only be a galling sense of failure. He agonised for their souls, and nothing came of it. Even his preaching had ceased to attract as it had done at first. The population of the valley had been more than decimated; generations must be born before it could be what it had been, and those who lived had sunk too deeply into hopeless despair to be roused to interest. Fallen even below the level of prostration, 'their complaining but a sigh,' suffering produced deep spiritual torpor. Later the Reformation breathed new life into their benumbed hearts, but for a time they were crushed and paralysed by the outcome of the war.

To Ulfric these long years had been even less eventful than to the priest of the Ilzthal; their history was that of such a struggle to attain a resignation which should not be only despair, as few souls know. If he did not attain it, if, when he thought the battle won, and that he had offered up his will, a living sacrifice, some merest trifle, a recollection, a sound, a scent on the summer wind, arousing some old association, would plunge him into an anguish of memories and longing, and, worst of all, show that the struggle must be all gone through again, and that his victory was but delusion, at least he did not yield. Struck down again and again, faith almost lost in crowding doubts and questionings why this lot was his, perhaps, but for Herr Basil, he would have succumbed. Amid all the manifold doubts which besieged the priest himself, his absolute belief in prayer, his intense personal love of his Master were never shaken, and upheld the leper in his hard warfare. But the help which Basil gave was less than that which he himself gained from beholding this noble effort at submission, this long struggle willingly to offer up body and soul. Unconsciously the priest unveiled more of his inner self, his secret thoughts, his restless questionings than Ulfric ever revealed in return. The one, craving sympathy, was soothed by knowing another occupied with his sorrows and cares; the other dared not dwell on a past which the present turned to gall. How endure his actual life, if he dwelt on that so rich and full of promise which once was his? Basil did not know even his name, nor his early history, nor when and how the curse came on him. He had heard his confession indeed many times, for to one like Basil von Below this leper could not appear dead and cut off from holy ordinances, but he asked no questions, and sought to know nothing which Ulfric did not volunteer. His sensitive, scrupulous delicacy forbade such a use of the confessional as many of his brethren made, thinking neither shame nor ill. That Ulfric was of gentle breeding he early perceived, and he gathered that from the convent where his mother retired when he was

lost to her, she sent him by a trusty hand ample means to supply his needs, but he had no suspicion that the leper of the Eschthal was the nephew of Graf Lichtenberg, or that on his revenues the Graf had first climbed to fortune and place. Ulfric was not aware that legally he might have retained them, nor, had he known it, would he have cared to do so. What could money and lands do for an outcast such as he?

An unusually long time had passed since Basil's last visit, and Ulfric wondered many times what detained him. He might have learned, had he gone into the Ilzthal, that the Pfarrer was absent, for the first time, since he came to his post, but Ulfric shrank from the 'scornful looks averse' of those who saw him, and who held it a pious duty to show their loathing of one thus Heaven-stricken. It had only been through intercourse with Ulfric, and by slow degrees, that Herr Basil himself had shaken off the belief that some special sin was marked and chastised in those whom leprosy claimed as victims; but such a facile way of displaying piety as was offered by showing abhorrence of such guilty wretches was not to be neglected by those ordinary sinners on whom no such mark was set. The very children would hoot, at safe distances, when a leper passed; Ulfric had seen a dog killed because it had run up and brushed his garment. Without absolute necessity he never went into the village, now rebuilt, and scantily populated by inhabitants, many of whom would bear to their dying day in brand and mutilation tokens of their share in the peasant war. He waited, sure that Basil would not fail to come as soon as he could, but it was with increasing wonder that Ulfric counted the days which went by without bringing him.

He came at last, and there was on his face that look of pure and lofty joy which Ulfric had sometimes seen there when a great gladness had come to one of his flock, or a soul had been saved out of great peril; yet his aspect was of one so worn and spent that it was plain he had been through some crisis which had exhausted him bodily and mentally.

'You have come at last!' Ulfric said, answering his call, and advancing to the mouth of his cave.

'I have come. You have wondered what delayed me?'

'I knew well you could come no sooner, else you had not let me want you so long.'

'You are right,' and then he paused and looked at him before adding, 'I have been to Göppingen, summoned there by one who could not gain leave to come and meet me, but who, sent thither on a mission by his abbot, called me to him.'

'One whom you know? Friend or kinsman?'

'No, neither,' said Herr Basil, with an intonation which Ulfric could not explain, and then he paused again, as if he had somewhat to say which he could not easily put into words.

'No, neither friend nor kin, but one who had a tale to tell me concerning a most dear friend; and, to tell it, must first make known his own unhappy story. For this monk had been one who felt within himself the longing and the power to rise among his fellow men hot within his heart, but poverty and humble station held him down, until he met with one like-minded to himself, and saw through him the way to fortune. But the first stepping-stone was a crime.'

'A crime?' Ulfric repeated, moved and struck by the suppressed thrill and excitement in the priest's voice.

'A crime so black, so treacherous that scarce could he face the thought, and long he held back after the foul thing first entered his mind, long tarried ere he spoke thereof to him who should chiefly profit thereby; but the fiend got the mastery over him, and he did the thing, and had rich guerdon, and went his way to fill a high post procured for him by the partner of his crime.'

'And then?' Ulfric asked, in much surprise that Herr Basil should speak thus openly, for surely only in confession could he have learned such a tale.

'All prospered with him, and men praised him much,

and he thought of that which he had done but now and then; perchance in the dead of night, if he lay awake while all was still, or when somewhat on a sudden recalled it to him. But because he had not reached that meridian of evil after which conscience is dumb, and a man sins smoothly and sleekly and feels no pang, God had pity on his soul, and sent presently such searching ill as made all which he ate and drank bitter, and one day as a year of hell. Needs not to speak longer thereof, better far thus than if Heaven had let him go on a silken way, and kept that crime to look him in the face at the Judgment. At last he would have sought to buy pardon by undoing the evil which he had wrought, but nowhere could he hear aught of his victim. And here again Heaven was merciful to him, for he had to learn what a man has done he cannot undo; no, though he weep tears of blood. He can but commend it unto Him with whom there is neither past nor future, because all is present.'

'You speak as if I knew this man,' said Ulfric, gazing earnestly at the priest.

'Truly, and but too well. But hear me. When he found he could not appease his conscience he entered a convent, and sought in many austerities to find peace. He had fled the world only to find it again in the cloister and in his own heart. Seeing in him a man keen of wit, and well versed in worldly matters, his superiors turned him to account, and set him to labour for Holy Church and the glory of his order. And ever he grew more bitter and scornful, and lost such faith as he had, until scarce a shred remained. Would you know the name of this unhappy man? In the world it was Thomas Knades.'

Ulfric started and shuddered from head to foot.

'Thomas Knades! What have I done that I should be minded of him?' he said, with intolerable pain and humiliation.

'You ask nothing of his crime?' said Herr Basil, gently.

'No—no, I would hear no more. You do not know

or you had not had the heart to speak of him to me—what that name calls back.'

'Nay, I know all.'

'All!' Ulfric exclaimed, with vehemence. 'None but my own soul and God know half what the very sound brings to my mind. It was he—he—the leech Thomas Knades—it was he who saw the signs in me that doomed me to this living death.'

'You speak more truly than you know, my brother.'

Ulfric started and gazed at him. 'I know not what you mean,' he said, and there was a sound of wonder and fear in his voice.

'That will I presently make clear, but first let me tell how this man, ever pursued by avengers crueller than the fabled Erinnys, who shake their fiery scourge above the guilty, grew well-nigh maddened by the thought of his sin, which, as he deemed, had brought Heaven's anger upon all dear to him, and believing his chief victim dead (chief, for others had at many times suffered through him; he came not at once to that worst crime), he lost all hope, and made, as I say, shipwreck, and even when at length he learned that the one whom he had worst harmed yet lived, he saw no light. For, see you, this unhappy man looked only into his own evil heart, and, never lifting his eyes to the pure manhood of his Lord, judged man and God by what he saw in himself.'

'And could you do nought for one whom you pity thus?'

'Little, alas! so little that I know not if I did aught. No word of mine seemed to reach him, and he has forgotten how to pray, if he ever knew it. The heaven seems as brass above him, and the earth as iron beneath him. All I could gain was that if he whom he worse than slew would go to him and freely pardon, then would he believe that God could pardon too.'

'Is it so hard then to pardon this thing that he has done?' asked Ulfric, much agitated, though he scarcely

knew why. The deep, suppressed emotion with which Herr Basil spoke, and his last words conveyed a dim, perplexed conviction that this story touched himself.

'Yes, my brother,' answered Herr Basil, in the gentlest, most appealing tones of his full, rich voice, 'so hard that the dear Master who appoints each his lot would only have set such a task to one whom He greatly loved and trusted, one who will not disappoint Him now—a man who has been chosen long to bear a heavy cross which no one could lighten for him nor any way share. And because he has been a good and faithful servant and soldier, now his Captain bids him do something yet greater, and save a soul for Him. That shall be his reward for what he has endured—surely meed enough if he may stand in the last day before his Lord and say, "Behold, I bring Thee this soul which Thou gavest me to save from everlasting death."'

'Is it of me that you speak?' asked Ulfric. 'What have I to forgive? This man—this Knades—spake but the cruel truth. I owe him no grudge for that; I forgive him as I would the doomster who struck me at the judge's bidding with his axe.'

'Aye, if it had been no more. Nay, peace! Hear me yet a moment—hear me as patiently as you may, dear friend and brother, and God help you to listen without cursing that most sinful and wretched man who worked your woe. Your mother in her charity housed him, poor and needy, when you were scarce yet grown to manhood, was it not so?'

'Yes. My mother!' repeated Ulfric; 'my mother whose heart broke for my sake. Speak not of her; that I have no courage to remember.'

'Then came tidings that your brother had fallen in battle, and that you, alas! were heir to all—you, a youth newly knighted, and there was no life but yours between the lands and one whom you perchance will find it as hard to forgive as Thomas Knades—a man who has risen to honour and high place, and repents not of anything he has done.'

'My uncle of Lichtenberg.'

'Then, a man well-nigh as poor and altogether as ambitious as Knades, who saw in the joyous and well-loved youth, who filled the castle with sweet music and sweeter songs, and brave young life, the thing that held him back from a great career and high place.'

'It doubtless was so; I thought not of it then.'

'That I well believe, but he pondered ever thereon, and the lust of ambition, the longing for that wealth which should give him power, grew always greater; and seeing the like passions in the breast of the leech, whose heart he read as a book open and plainly writ, he gave him to understand that he who put the stumbling-block out of his way should rise with him.'

'I know not what you would say. . . . Sought they to take my life?'

'At that the Graf hinted, but Knades liked it ill. He would not take life, but he gave the Graf to believe that by a drink, cunningly prepared, he could bring the curse of leprosy on man or beast.'

'He—he did that!—God of Heaven!' exclaimed Ulfric.

There was a silence; the priest watched him with an intensity of anxiety and supplication which seemed to strain his very soul. Then Ulfric broke forth with a cry like that of one in mortal pain.

'He did that! that! He would not take my life—oh, mocking fiend, did he not doom me to a thousand deaths? All these years—all these endless years—all those yet to come! How had I harmed him that he thus gave me over, body and soul, to this misery? And my mother, my mother—when I think on her anguish . . . her one son, all left her! Can this thing be true?'

'He has suffered perchance the more of you twain,' said Pfarrer Basil.

'Would I knew it! then had I indeed revenge. I would not wish even such a foe as he a fuller cup of pain than mine has been—mine, which he set to the lips of one who never hurt him!'

'I know not that, for he, proud and poor, took many

a light word amiss, perhaps never meant for him, and even such a joyous youth as yours was gall unto him.'

Ulfric did not heed. He continued with increasing passion, 'I have sought, aye, that much you know, to bear my lot patiently, thinking it set by God, and now to learn it was man's doing, for guerdon.'

'Yet none the less permitted by God,' said the priest.

'Speak not so, Herr Prediger, lest I think Heaven accomplices with this vile traitor in my misery! And this Graf, this prosperous, high-placed traitor—is there no justice anywhere that such a man walks smiling and sleek under the sky?'

Herr Basil made no answer. His sad and troubled gaze rested silently on the leper.

'You bid me forgive!' Ulfric exclaimed; 'your eyes reproach me that I have no word of pardon. Measure if you can, before you talk of forgiveness, what this leech, this Thomas Knades, has done to me; think what my life might have been, how fair, how full of brave deeds and sweet love; how, but for him, I had walked gladly among my fellow men, and praised God for His good gifts. What is it? What must it be until death comes? Loathly to all men, and most of all to myself. No hand shall ever touch mine; no eye look on me with love; no heart ever beat on mine, nor any be the better that I have lived. Even my gift of song has left me; no lay comes any more to cheer my desolation. I am dead, yet I cannot die.'

'It is most true.'

'Aye, most true; that is honestly said. And, knowing this, seeing what I am, you can ask me to pardon and pity the man who wrought such wrong? And doubtless also my fair uncle of Lichtenberg, who, indeed, was the kinder of the two, for had he had his will I were now out of this world.'

'Yes, Ulfric, I ask no less. I know not if I myself could do this thing; perchance not; no such hard task has been given me; I am not worthy that my Lord should ask it of me. But He has seen you worthy; this

thing is offered you to do, no knightly deed such as all would magnify, not anything which men know and praise, but somewhat to do for His sake. He has held you back from passing joys and worldly honours, nor given you aught that the frail human heart longs after; He has set you apart in a solitude with Himself, and now He comes, and by my lips offers you a work to do for Himself, which no other can. I tell you the soul of this man is given to you; will you have it or not? Nay, I will say more; will you save it as a thankoffering for the lot given you? Surely hereafter you will see that you would have chosen it and no other had you known all things as He does. How can you say that, had life run smooth and clear, you had not been such a one as Graf Lichtenberg; and many a one who is honoured among men, yet is fouler at heart than ever was leper's body?'

'You say all this—yet you yourself have shrunk from the sight of me,' said Ulfric, with bitterness.

'God forgive me!' said Herr Basil, covering his face with his hands, and the anguish in his tones was as keen as any which Ulfric had felt.

Ulfric sat bowed and mute. The flow of the stream and the rustle in the branches alone broke the hush, as the summer breeze came and went, laden with the odours of the pine trees and shaking down the wild rose petals from the bushes on the cliff overhead.

'It goes then very sore with this Thomas Knades?' he said at last.

'So sore that despair has well-nigh lost his soul,' answered Herr Basil.

'And he craves so greatly for pardon?'

'As one in a desert craves for water.'

'What moved him to call for you and tell all?'

'Sent to Hohentwiel, he heard our Hildemund sing a lay which he remembered as yours, and he had come hither himself, had he known but where to seek you, and owned the truth.'

'Ah!' said Ulfric, as if the thought of the meeting were insupportable. 'It is well he came not.'

Again there was a long silence. The priest prayed fervently, with folded hands, his eyes on Ulfric, following with keen sympathy the struggle in his breast.

Rising at length, the leper said in a grave, deep tone, 'Since my Lord will have no other work of me in this His world, and since He gives me this bitter thing to do for His sake, I will at least do it willingly, lest though there be oil and wood, I bring no lamp to the sacrifice. Bear my pardon to Thomas Knades; nay, if he will not believe otherwise, I will seek him myself, and tell him that since the man whom he has thus injured can forgive, he may look with good hope to the mercy of Him for whose sake I do this.'

Herr Basil stood up, his countenance illumined with a joy so pure and lofty, that Ulfric thought, whenever he recalled it, that it would be the look he would wear in Paradise.

'Blessed be the dear Lord by whose grace you have done this, my brother,' he said, stretching out his hands in blessing. 'The soul of your enemy shall be given you, and not this only. And now hear; he who knew you would do this for His sake has yet another message for you. Because you have meekly accepted shame and ignominy, and taken up your cross at His bidding, He has now other work for you: He bids you arise and go forth, not Ulfric the leper, but a man free and pure from all stain and sickness.'

'Alas! would you have me believe a miracle shall be worked for such as I?'

'Dear son, cast aside these wrappings, and see if there be any sign of the foul disease upon you?'

'Nay, there is none, but it ever lurks in the blood it has once tainted; all know it may for a while disappear, yet only to return.'

'True, alas! and therefore he who has fallen under its clutch may return no more among his kind,' said Herr Basil, who held the notions as to leprosy universal in his day; 'but hearken Ulfric, for I have tidings of great joy for you. This Knades played the Graf false; no such power had he as he feigned. A drug, indeed,

he gave, which brought you nigh to death, and none doubted, since he was known to be a learned leech, that he spake sooth when he whispered that you were sick of leprosy. None sought to know more; his word sufficed, and all hurried to bury the thing in secrecy for the honour of your kindred.'

'They did,' said Ulfric with a deep gloom. The bearing of all which Herr Basil was saying was so alien to everything which he had believed through these years of wretchedness that he could hardly comprehend it.

'And thus the deceit was easily carried out,' Basil added, 'but leper you never were.'

Ulfric answered only by a dizzy gesture. All was reeling before his eyes. 'I—I dream,' he said.

'It is no dream,' answered the priest; 'blessed be God it is no dream, and blessed be He that to me He has given the joy of bidding you return from the dead into the world of living men.'

He laid his hand on Ulfric's head as he spoke, and for the first time in sixteen years the outcast of the Eschthal felt the touch of a fellow man.

CHAPTER XXV.

HERR BASIL undertook, with a sort of childlike joy and pleasure, to procure for Ulfric garments such as he must have before returning to ordinary life. The delay was more trying to Basil than to Ulfric himself; for while the priest was all eager impatience to conduct him to Thomas Knades, Ulfric shrank with sensitive reluctance from facing his fellow men after the long seclusion in which he had lived, and craved time to realise all which he had heard. Notwithstanding his quick sympathy, Basil did not guess that Ulfric found it not less but more difficult to pardon the monk, when he learned that at any time during all these years he might have resumed his place in the world. It brought a cruel

sense of unreality in his trial, of wasted struggle, full of distress. But when he knelt in the church of the Ilzthal, while Herr Basil said a mass on his behalf, the austere joy of self-sacrifice, the gladness that he had a gift to lay before the altar which cost him much, revealed itself to him and flooded his soul, and then, as one newly baptised, he took up life again, strengthened and ennobled by the long battle which he had fought, and by the great victory which had crowned it. His heart seemed to open to life and joy, and a thousand sweet possibilities, and it was a full and free pardon which he bore to Thomas Knades.

Herr Basil came back alone. By him, also, a turning point in life had been reached, though none knew it but himself, and he needed to prepare for what lay before him.

Of all these things Hildemund, slowly making his way to the Ilzthal, of course knew nothing. He had quitted his disguise as soon as he dared do so, and was returning to his birthplace, not as a gleeman or a fugitive, but as the body squire of the Duke, with the confident hope of knighthood before him. Of Prince Christopher he had heard nothing but rumours, blown about, that he had escaped from captivity, and was concealed by his uncles of Bavaria. Hildemund thought it not unlikely that by-and-bye he would seek their court, and appeal to their powerful protection, but felt sure that he was now either at Hohentwiel, or on his road thither, with Graf Eberstein, and he could picture the rejoicings that Christopher's arrival would occasion. The position of Ulrich was totally changed by the escape of his heir out of Austrian hands. Charles V. had never been able to bring forward any valid pretext why the Prince should not have succeeded to his father's dukedom, whatever the offences of Ulrich might have been, but while he could be held a prisoner, the Emperor troubled himself not at all as to this, and turned a deaf and contemptuous ear to all remonstrances. Ulrich had had few friends and many enemies, and no one had interfered on his behalf, but when it became

clear that Würtemberg would be annexed to the other vast possessions of Hapsburg, the Electors looked on with rising alarm and jealousy. Now, no doubt, they would call for an answer why the duchy was withheld from both father and son, for Christopher would not fail to put forth his claims, and, recollecting what a gallant and noble youth he seemed, Hildemund could not believe that he would seek to profit at his father's expense. It might be that Archduke Ferdinand would have to resign Würtemberg without a blow. If so, Ulrich was no man to let his tried and faithful follower go unrewarded.

It was of no guerdon to himself that Hildemund was thinking. Now, as ever, his first thought was for Dornröschen. The Duke had promised to right her, and he would keep his word, even though he owed a certain debt of gratitude to Graf von Lichtenberg for his secret warning as to the designs on Prince Christopher. But then—what then? Hildemund knew that the young heiress of Burgstein and Rosenthal would be a prize eagerly sought, but the prospect was as yet far off, and it was the cud of sweet far more than of bitter fancies that he was chewing as he rode into the Ilzthal, thinking of the proud gladness with which his mother and yet more Dornröschen would hear that he had won his spurs at Duke Ulrich's hand.

He crossed the stream by a ford well known to him, some half mile from the village, and suddenly came in sight of the Burgstein. Far overhead stood the ruins of the castle, and the sun glinted on the silvery Pöllatwasser. Yonder was the church, niched under the Rossberg, and there the group of trees which had borne such a fatal burden when last he saw them. Again he could fancy he saw the dead bodies and the crowd lamenting below. The village had been rebuilt on the old foundations, and the summers and winters, the sun and rain which had already swept over it had taken away all look of freshness. Hildemund could almost have fancied it the old hamlet, but children whom he did not know were straying on the green, and there were

grown men and women at work in the fields who had been boys and girls when he left the Ilzthal.

As he drew rein to let a woman pass, carrying a heavy web of linen from the bleaching field, she stopped and looked up, astonished at such unusual courtesy from a Junker, and something about her seemed familiar to him.

'Is the Geistliche Herr at home, good woman?' he asked, more to make her speak than because he wanted a reply.

'I know not, fair sir,' she answered, still gazing at him, as if on her side too were a dim recognition, and then he knew her, in spite of the change from a comely lass to a haggard woman, whose age might have been sixty rather than under thirty, but it was in incredulous tones that he exclaimed:

'Bärbele!'

'That is my name,' she answered, greatly surprised, and with a touch of alarm.

'Do you not know me, Bärbele?'

'Herr Je! it cannot be! Mary and Joseph! it is not Hildemund Dahn?'

'Yes, it is. I have come back to see the old home.'

'Mary and Joseph!' she repeated, staring at him, 'sure you have become a noble?'

'Not so, but a squire now, and soon, I hope, a knight.'

'Good lack!' said Bärbele, unable to recover her astonishment. 'There are then some with whom the world has gone well!'

'I fear greatly it has not done so with you, my poor Bärbele. Did Gerhardt come home from the war?'

'Holy Virgin! do not speak of that!' she exclaimed under her breath, with a terrified glance round her. 'Yes, he came back.'

'But you are not married,' said Hildemund, seeing by her dress and unringed hand that she was unwedded.

'No!' she answered fiercely, 'would you have me bear children to be as miserable as ourselves?'

'Poor Bärbele!' said Hildemund, full of pity, and look and tone touched her, and seemed to melt the apathetic despair which usually marked her air, and she said, 'The dear Frau—lives she yet? Ah, we have missed her sorely.'

'She grieved much to leave you so suddenly, but life and more turned on speedy and secret flight.'

'That I can well believe,' said Barbara, moving on beside him. 'Ah, Junker Hildemund, we have seen black days! My little lady! Some of us would fain that like her we had perished up yonder! Yet I would she had lived; I have wept often for her, till I had no tears left except for my own troubles, and I think I have none left even for them.'

She was looking up to the Burgstein as she spoke, and Hildemund considered whether he dared now tell her that Rosilde was safe, but she stopped him by exclaiming with a start, 'Holy Mary! this is no place for you. I had forgot, but the bailiff has bidden any who see you bear him speedy word thereof if they value their lives, for he has orders from Sir Wolfgang to seize and hold you fast. But he spoke of a gleeman—it was as a gleeman he thought to find you.'

'So!' said Hildemund, considerably startled. 'Is this my welcome? Think you any will know me, Bärbele?'

She stood still and looked at him.

'Scarcely; I had not done so had you not called me by name. I knew the voice, but all else is so changed that even now I can scarce believe mine eyes.'

'Less changed than yourself, poor girl,' Hildemund thought to himself, observing with fresh pity and wonder the havoc which hardships and grief had wrought.

'I mean not to linger here,' he said aloud, 'but I must see Herr Basil, and my old home, and one other friend. Take this for my sake, Barbara.'

He pressed a piece of money into her hand, and rode across to the presbytery. A neighbour or two who had seen her speaking with him came from their doorways to ask who the young knight was.

'One who seeks the Pfarrer,' she answered, and no suspicion was excited.

Herr Basil sat in his little chamber, leaning his head on his hand, and looking out of his window, with a far-off, absorbed gaze, which showed his mind was elsewhere. He at least was little altered, Hildemund thought, as he stood looking at him for an instant before he spoke his name. The sound made him start, yet he looked round absently, as if still so occupied with his thoughts that he could hardly bring them back to what was immediately before him. Hildemund smiled and spoke again, and then a glad flash of recognition came on the priest's face, and he stood up, and held out his hands with warm welcome.

'My son! Is this too given me?' he said, bending his head in thanksgiving. 'I had not dared to hope this; more is granted me than I asked. Tell me whence you come, and all the story of these years.'

Hildemund had never seen him so simply glad and tender. He told of the perilous task in which he had been engaged. 'I would fain you said a mass and gave thanks for me, honoured sir,' he added, 'both for the Prince's escape and my own, for indeed I scarce thought to return. Even now I know not how it was that Wolfgang von Lichtenberg did not bring up against me the burning of the castle and my sharing in the war; I had been a lost man had he but done so.'

'Perhaps he knew nought thereof. I take it his father was so greatly displeased at the order he took here that the bailiff and all others concerned in burning the village spake as little ever after of it as they could. Yes, that mass I will surely say, but I fear you may not tarry to assist at it, my son, though perchance the bailiff may fear to lay hands on a young squire such as thou art become, when he looked but for a poor vagrant gleeman.'

'I know—Barbara told me. How pitifully she is changed! Can so few years have done this?'

'Alas! she has not suffered more than others here. Want and fear and toil age the very children.'

'I would she and her parents, if they yet live, could have had our empty house. The good seneschal's family!'

'You forget they may not leave Burgstein lands for those of another lord.'

'Aye, so I did. I would fain have done something for old Walther's family.'

'It is hard to bid thee go, my dear son, yet I would thou wert safely hence.'

'Come what may I must see Ulfric ere I leave the valley.'

'Thou art headstrong as ever! Just so didst thou answer when last we met!' said Herr Basil, smiling. 'But thou wilt not find Ulfric in the Eschthal. Stay, thou must eat and drink ere departing, and when the food is before thee I will tell thee a tale.'

He put such provisions as he had upon the table, and Hildemund said, 'I see by your tone, reverend sir, that nought is amiss with Ulfric, but whither then is he gone? I had somewhat to tell him of the strange monk of whom I spoke but now, he who came to Hohentwiel.'

'Aye! But perhaps I can tell thee more of this Thomas Knades than thou canst tell me,' said Herr Basil.

Hildemund listened with amazement only equalled by his joy and indignation.

'No leper! blessed be the saints! What black treachery! St. Lazarus of Jerusalem! How could he forgive this man? It was a godlike thing! That could I never have done, less still this Graf, who heaps crime on crime, yet on whom no chastisement has fallen!'

'It will yet fall. And when you think of him, pray that it may be in this world.'

'He is not mine enemy that I should forgive him, but that of my friend; I pardon not such foes as those,' said Hildemund, hotly.

Pfarrer Basil smiled and shook his head, but wasted no words on his indignant hearer.

'Where is Ulfric now?' Hildemund asked.

'He first sought Thomas Knades with me, and then he went to seek his mother.'

'Ah!' said Hildemund with a deep breath, as he realised through his love for his own mother something of what that meeting must have been to both. 'And then what did he purpose?'

'As I understood, he thought to go to Ulm.'

'To Ulm!' repeated Hildemund, longingly. 'How my mother would rejoice to learn all this! How she would give thanks that he thus pardoned his foe!'

'He desired greatly to see her, and his young cousin also.'

'His cousin?'

'Surely, Rosilde von Burgstein, who is near akin to him, nearer than to Graf Lichtenberg.'

'Ah, true. She, too, would be glad; she loved him tenderly when, as a little child, she sought the Eschthal and listened to that angel voice of his—which, indeed, she long held to be verily that of a heavenly messenger.'

'See you not, too, that she is rather his ward than that of the Graf, since Ulfric is not only of nearer kin, but head of the house, now that the line of Burgstein is ended in a girl. The tale of Thomas Knades touches her nearly.'

'It does!' answered Hildemund, joyfully, as the fear which had haunted him on Dornröschen's account was thus laid to rest.

'Aye,' continued Pfarrer Basil, eagerly, and quite unaware of the course his thoughts had taken, 'had Ulfric again his rights, as doubtless he will one day have, he could protect her against all danger, nay more—she is grown to maidenhood, what so fitting as that they—the Church's leave being gained—should wed; and thus would she be beyond all peril from the Graf, who otherwise will surely press hard that her hand be given to his son, that he lose not all with Ulfric's return to life. I spoke thereof to Ulfric, and he was well disposed to have it so. He has ever held in fond remembrance the child who loved him and feared him not.'

Pfarrer Basil spoke with eager satisfaction. He had devised the plan and dwelt on it with much pleasure, but, looking up, he stopped short; Hildemund did not know how much his countenance had betrayed until he saw it in the priest's startled face.

'What have you against it?' asked Herr Basil, sharply and suddenly.

'Nought. It is as it should be,' Hildemund answered, rallying all his strength to meet the shock.

'Doubtless it is. It were most unfitting to keep the heiress of Burgstein and Rosenthal hidden under a false name and in a false position, save for right urgent causes. The maiden is of marriageable age, and girls are then a perilous charge. Many may woo her, knowing not her name and rank, and your mother be scarce able to keep suitors aloof. It is not just that so heavy a burden lie on her. Says she not so?'

'Dornröschen can never be a burden. But you are right, reverend sir. Is all then already fixed?'

'That I know not. Ere Ulfric claims his bride he must see his way to regaining his lands. The Graf lets not go what he once has grasped, and he is high in Imperial favour. Little like is it that Ulfric will at once recover them, the more that he counts to offer his sword to Duke Ulrich.'

'That is well,' said Hildemund, pale with the inward struggle which he had gone through while Basil was speaking. 'The Duke has need of all good swords which offer, and such a one as Ulfric's will be worth a dozen of other men's. And when Würtemberg has her lord again, he will do justice to Ulfric—and Dornröschen.'

But the name faltered on his lips. The vehement self-disgust with which he found that he could hardly now rejoice that Ulfric was no leper had given him strength to crush down the unworthy feeling, but it was a fresh and most keen pang to see that after all she might regain name and rank not through him, but through another. His life's aim seemed snatched from him. A sudden memory darted through him of how,

involuntarily, but none the less absolutely, he himself had shattered Magdalene's cherished hopes. It seemed like retribution. Pfarrer Basil's eyes rested on him with mingled sorrow and displeasure.

'My son, what is this?' he said. 'Am I to understand that you have raised your eyes to Rosilde von Burgstein?'

'Never,' answered Hildemund, and Herr Basil could not question the absolute truth of the frank look raised to his. 'My heart's desire has been to see her restored to her rightful name and station; that should be answer enough.'

'And yet——?'

'How should the Rose of Burgstein not be the sweetest thing on earth—the most priceless treasure in my eyes? Could I have seen her close, first in childhood, and then in her fair, pure girlhood, and not have poured out for her all the love I have to give? It harms her not! None was ever harmed by a great love. Neither by word nor look have I given her to know of it; she will only think of me as an elder brother, a trusty friend.'

'See it be so! And yet,' added Herr Basil, relenting, as he was sure to do when he had been hasty or severe, ''tis sore pity.'

He looked compassionately at the young man, in whose face he could trace tokens of keen suffering, bravely suppressed; 'would I could comfort you, my son!'

Hildemund smiled painfully. He thought that one to whom love was unknown and forbidden could ill gauge what he felt.

'There are battles in which a man must fight alone, reverend sir. I pray you to forget all this. Ulfric must never know that his joy makes my pain. None worthier could I find for her, if I searched Germany through, and surely even such happiness as this is due to him after all his sorrow.'

'True, yet it is a sore crook that one man's bliss is another's bane,' said Pfarrer Basil.

Neither questioned Rosilde's entire acquiescence in the arrangement. It never occurred to either that a girl had any voice in such matters.

'This Thomas Knades,' said Hildemund, feeling that he could endure no more until he had had time to face the thought alone. 'How took he Ulfric's pardon?'

A cloud came over the priest's face.

'Struck he was, and slow to believe, even when he found that Ulfric had forgiven fully and freely before he knew that indeed he was no leper, but the evil spirit was not cast out; he has sinned and disbelieved too long easily to return to the path of faith. Yet sure I am his soul shall be saved. It was made known to me that so it should be if the victim of his crime would pardon. Ulfric has won his soul. Methinks every man has somewhat to do in this world of which he shall hereafter say, "Therefore came I to this hour," and Ulfric's shall be the saving of Thomas Knades. I wait and pray, but I know that saved he shall be ere he die.'

'I may linger no longer, reverend father; the shadows grow long, and my tarrying may belike bring peril on you as well as me.'

'Heaven bless and keep you, my dear son, and give you good gifts from the golden treasure house,' said Herr Basil, rising too, and looking wistfully and with deep tenderness at Hildemund; 'we meet no more.'

'Dear sir! wherefore say you so?'

'I go hence, and my place shall know me no more. I am about to leave the Ilzthal and dwell at Hamburg, where there is a lazar house. Henceforth my task will be to tend, and if it may be, to comfort those poor prisoners of God on whom His hand rests so heavily.'

Hildemund stood dumb. He recollected Herr Basil's intense shrinking from all that was loathsome, or even painful; how, on their first meeting even the cry of a terrified animal had seemed agony to him; how long it had cost him a visible struggle to approach Ulfric; and he could hardly believe his ears.

'I know your thoughts,' said Basil, smiling sadly. 'Once, aye, and still even now, this weak heart and weaker flesh shrank from all which could offend them. The more reason wherefore I should crush both. But not that only. Ulfric, in his struggle to overcome his wrath against his enemy, spake words which showed me my infirmity, my hardness of heart—for surely it is nought else—were a stumbling-block in his way. I vowed within myself that if he were victor in that hard strife I would devote myself to this work. And his victory sealed my vow.'

Hildemund understood now. Just so, with vehement, uncalculating self-sacrifice would this man have acted at such a time; but his dismay could not be controlled.

'Ah, dear sir! it is a fearful thing to do! Once within those walls you come forth no more, and besides——'

'I know what you would say,' answered Herr Basil, the faint flush which emotion had called to his face fading, and leaving it if possible even paler than before. 'The flesh shrinks back, but I shall be upheld. My longing is to embrace the cross and the promise of death. Enough for me if I can bind up some broken hearts. Surely if I tell the story of Ulfric's sixteen years under the curse which has also stricken them, they will take courage.'

'But your flock here, dear sir,' Hildemund ventured to plead. 'How will they fare, you gone hence?'

'Alas! my successor must indeed do little for them if he do not more than I,' said the priest, with profound melancholy. 'In all these years I know not whether I have done anything which another might not have done better. Yet I love my people, and in Würzburg it seemed as if I could touch men's hearts.'

'Yes, yes, reverend sir; I heard much of that when I was there.'

'Did you?' said Herr Basil, the flush returning to his cheek, and an eager light to his eyes. 'They remember me still?'

'Most fondly—most gratefully. All I spoke with longed for your return.'

'Ah!' and a look of mournful yearning came over his countenance. 'And I might have seen them again. I might—my own beloved people! But it is best otherwise.'

'Oh, worthy sir, if indeed you can return——'.

'Hush, hush, no more of that! Get thee behind me! Nay, I meant not to speak so hastily, but it was as if the tempter, who is ever urging me to draw back, spake by your voice. Surely it was his doing that just when I had offered myself to this work came my recall to Würzburg. My family, unknown to me, had procured it. But I may not—I will not listen. My hand is on the plough; I dare not turn back. And so best. Though indeed I long to return and see again the faces of those whom once I builded up in the faith, and for whom I have ever prayed night and day, I am sick of conflict, sick of questioning. I do harm where most I would do good; I scarce know right from wrong, so mazed am I by the clash of tongues and thoughts in this distracted age. How often have I spoken rashly and smitten when my Master's word would have been, "Put up thy sword into the sheath."'

'My mother once said that when His servants do this, He comes Himself and heals the wounds which they have made,' said Hildemund.

'Said like herself! I have missed her deep thoughts as a dweller in a desert would miss the spring at which he was wont to drink draughts of cool, refreshing water, if one day he came and found a stone laid on its mouth. May He indeed heal where I have wounded! And now my son, my dear son, farewell. We shall see each other's faces no more until we meet where all things will be made plain. Pray for me, as I for you.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

'THIS once, Muhme!'

Rosilde was standing before Frau Magdalene with a laughing, supplicating look, underneath which something earnest was hidden.

'To-morrow is our greatest Saint's Day, surely I may wear my best to do St. Ursula honour, since I am to take part this year in the procession. You refused last year, Muhme!'

'I did, and I would I could do so again. Dear child, until you can resume your name and station such costly things are ill suited to one who is but Röschen Dahn in the eyes of all here,' said Frau Magdalene, sorely perplexed, though it went to her heart to refuse Dornröschen leave to wear her ancestral jewels—those jewels which Freifrau Faustina had sent with her to the Bannwart's house, and which Magdalene had felt bound to carry away for her in their hasty flight, whatever else was left behind. They had lain unseen in their casket ever since; Rosilde had shown no interest in them, though aware of their existence. A burgher maid could not wear such precious things, as Magdalene now reminded her, and Rosilde had not only been content to play the part of a burgher maid, but was inclined to push Magdalene's own line of indifference to show and wealth to an extreme. Now, however, she seemed carried away by the general excitement. All Ulm was preparing for the annual procession, in which all the fairest and noblest of the city were proud to play a part. There was as much intriguing and anxiety about it as if a post of life-long honour had been in question; to have a prominent part was the great event in the life of an Ulmer maiden; and year by year much open or veiled triumph, many heartburnings and secret grudges were the outcome of this day. Even had Dornröschen's fair face not assured her of a place in the procession, she was held too entirely as a member of Master Philip Welser's family not to be

invited. To have left her out would have been held a slight to the honoured and revered counsellor which was not to be thought of. Magdalene had strained her authority to the utmost when on the preceding year she had declined the coveted honour for her charge. Even Master Welser, who alone in the household knew whom his roof sheltered, was deaf to her arguments, led away by his indulgent affection for Dornröschen, and his sense of the honour offered; and Katharina Paumgärtner, though she looked on her with other eyes, was highly displeased, while her husband openly expressed his disapproval and amazement. Dornröschen had submitted, but Magdalene found her refusal so difficult to justify, either to her own family or the public, that she could not again decline. And Dornröschen, full of girlish delight, had brought out her jewels, and loosing the thick tresses usually restrained in many plaits by a silver arrow, was winding her pearls among them, while she pleaded, 'This once, Muhme! I shall never wear them again; I know they only befit noble ladies, and I think that burghers' wives and daughters should not ape the dress of noble dames,' she added, with a mischievous intonation, which Magdalene very well knew was meant for Katharina; but she did not divine that the girl's persistency was prompted by the desire that for once Hildemund should see her arrayed as Rosilde of Burgstein. Magdalene would not notice the little hit at Katharina, but replied gravely and gently, 'Nay, my child, you will not always be a burgher maiden, and doubtless you will wear these jewels on your marriage-day.'

'Yes, by-and-bye, when I wed a noble! But, Muhme, I recollect an old saying of Bärbele's—poor Bärbele! I would I knew what had befallen her!—"the street of By-and-bye leads to the house of Never." So will it be with me.'

'I think not so,' said Magdalene, who, during the time that Ulfric had spent at Ulm after parting from Herr Basil, had been made acquainted with his project, and had seen how his first calm interest in Rosilde had deepened into passion, and who was far too loyal and

upright to allow her motherly feeling for Hildemund to influence her. 'I see a fair life before thee, and an arm which shall guard and protect thee already outstretched.'

Several times before she had approached the subject, but Rosilde either did not or would not understand what Magdalene was not yet authorised to put into plain words. The girl looked at her now with the large limpid eyes, which were at once frank, yet not easy to read.

'You will not understand!' she exclaimed impetuously, 'yet *you* might, Muhme, you who married Kilian Dahn!'

Magdalene started. All at once she perceived that unawares in those tender, confidential hours which had been so sweet to both of them, she had set before Rosilde an ideal of wedded love which might fatally interfere with that calm submission, that readiness to accept any suitor chosen by their family, which was expected of all girls.

'One who weds a good man learns love after marriage and is a happy wife,' she answered. 'Look round and see if it be not so.'

'That is true. But how if you had known Kilian and yet were bidden to wed—would you then have given yourself to any other, Muhme!' pursued Rosilde, still looking at her.

'I—I know not,' said Magdalene, blushing as if she had still been a girl; 'wherefore ask such idle questions?'

'I know right well what I should have done in such a plight,' said Rosilde, lifting her head like a young stag, 'and if need be you shall know too, dear Muhme. But let me forget it all now. What does anything matter when Duke Ulrich is coming to the city,—and Hildemund?'

'And Sir Ulfric,' added Magdalene, upon which Rosilde turned impatiently away. Magdalene knew very well that she ought to rebuke her, and her conscience told her that she had always been far more indulgent to her wilful charge than she would have been

to her had Rosilde been her own daughter, but it was too late to amend now, the more that in spite of formality and discipline being the order of that day, every soul in the house had combined to spoil Dornröschen, with the one exception of Katharina. Presently Rosilde returned to the attack with, 'Muhme, if Master Welser says I may wear those jewels, you will not say me nay?'

'When did my uncle ever refuse aught you asked, wilful maid?' said Magdalene, too glad to escape from such a dangerous topic as Kilian Dahn and herself to oppose her further, and Rosilde fastened another string of large pearls in her profuse light brown hair, through which golden threads ran and glistened in the sun, and clasped around her slender throat a necklet formed of golden roses with centres of diamonds or rubies.

'Hildemund has never seen these,' she said, standing before a Venetian mirror, and contemplating herself with simple and serious interest. 'Just this once I should like to wear them. Now I will show them to Master Welser.'

She ran off. Philip Welser's private room was never closed against her. She had become more and more the old man's favourite with each year which she had spent under his roof, and she had learned to love him well. Magdalene looked after her lithe figure with a troubled expression. She could see nothing but perplexity before her; for while Duke Ulrich's affairs had begun to run so smoothly that Ulm had sent to offer him alliance and aid, if need were, to recover his duchy, and he was about to come, under cover of the great annual festival, to discuss the matter in person with the Rath, those of Dornröschen were but a tangled skein. Ulfric had seen it advisable to await the Duke's restoration to his throne before claiming his estates, and as yet Graf Lichtenberg knew nothing of the blow hanging over him; but Magdalene felt sure that he could not long delay to seek Rosilde as his bride, and she feared greatly how this project would be met, for Rosilde had shown more shy fear than pleasure when their relationship had been made known to her, and he had claimed her as ward

and kinswoman; it seemed either as if she could not dissociate him from his old character, and that what she had not felt at all as a child, painfully affected her now, or else that she could only regard him as a stranger who came with a claim upon her, and obliged her to recollect she was not Magdalene's own. Since Ulfric's appearance forced this upon her, Ulfric himself was unwelcome. That he did not guess her feelings, Magdalene knew. Bewitched, enchanted by the wayward maiden, he had given himself up entirely to all the delightful hopes from which he had been so long severed. Magdalene's heart ached both for him and Hildemund. She could see nothing but pain for one or the other, or for both. The best she could hope was that Rosilde's affection for her old friend and companion would remain as innocently frank as now. If so, if nothing aroused a deeper, more conscious feeling, she might yet be a happy wife, and make Ulfric's life glad. But Magdalene would have given a great deal if Hildemund had not been coming to Ulm with the Duke, however much she longed to see him again; and to embrace her new made knight.

Rosilde, on her way to Philip Welser, had met Katharina, sweeping by with her stately step, but she stopped and exclaimed, 'What is this, maiden? Wherefore are you thus decked, and whence came those jewels?'

She could hardly credit what she saw. Such pearls and such a necklet she herself could not boast.

'My mother sent them to Muhme ere she died,' answered Rosilde.

'Your mother! they are fit for a princess!' said Katharina, in great astonishment, and then she bethought her that since Kilian Dahn was a soldier, others of his family might have followed the same trade, and carried off these precious things in the sack of some castle or city. But the owner of such goodly possessions was not the penniless dependent which she had hitherto been in the eyes of Frau Paumgärtner, who, though proud as any noble, came of merchant blood, and

Dornröschen rose considerably in her eyes. She was so much moved by what she had heard that she sought Magdalene, and embarrassed her not a little by her wondering inquiries. She was evidently displeased at never having been told that Dornröschen possessed such valuables. Magdalene thought how true her previsions had been that the sight of them would cause trouble, but she did not guess how much more they were to entail.

Rosilde opened the door of Master Welser's room, but stood still in the doorway, a pretty picture of startled confusion. Instead of being alone, as usual at this hour, Master Welser was in earnest conversation with two visitors, who both wore knightly mantles over their short velvet coats, and in the broad hat of one waved the black and white feathers of Lichtenberg. They turned while she stood hesitating and confused, and she saw their faces. With a glad cry she sprang forward. 'Hildemund!' she exclaimed, entirely overlooking and forgetting his companion. 'We did not look for you till to-morrow, when the Duke enters. Why did you not come at once to seek us?'

Hildemund had turned red and pale as he kissed her hand.

'There was much which the Duke desired to make known to my good uncle here ere he lays it before the Rath,' he said, 'and moreover there is one here who has a better right to greet you first than I.'

'A better right than you!' Rosilde said, astonished.

'Aye, sweet rose-bud, your cousin and guardian here,' said Philip Welser, in whose eyes the projects of Ulfric found much favour. 'Have you no word for him?'

Ulfric advanced smiling, and she received his greeting with a shade of reluctance and embarrassment.

'I saw only Hildemund,' she said, defiantly, 'and no one has a better right to my first welcome than he.'

She lifted her eyes to his, but he dared not meet them, though he had braced himself up for the interview.

Now that it had come he found how far from complete his self-schooling had been. He had not betrayed himself in any of those cruel hours when, together at Hohentwiel, Ulfric had spoken of his love, of the sweetness and charms which he had found in Rosilde. Prepared in some degree by Herr Basil, Hildemund had heard and made no sign, even while inwardly asking himself what Ulfric could know of her compared to himself, who had seen her grow up, had held her as his dearest treasure all these years. He meant to pass through this last hard trial with equal success. But it was more difficult than he had looked for—cruelly difficult when Rosilde's smiling eyes grew troubled and the gladness in her face changed to questioning wonder. He knew he was assuming a respect, a calm deference too unlike the terms on which they had hitherto been not to perplex her, but do what he would he could not strike that note of tender brotherliness which he sought to find.

'And wherefore are you so decked, little one?' Philip Welser asked, almost in the same words which Katharina had done, but in a far other tone, and the looks of both Hildemund and Ulfric reflected the fond admiration which he involuntarily betrayed as he looked at Rosilde, standing before him with her long hair flowing over her dark-red dress, confined only by the pearls wound in it, while the golden necklet encircled the rounded throat left bare by her square-cut bodice. She drew a pattern on the ground with the tip of her embroidered shoe, and said coaxingly, 'Dear Master Welser, you know I am to be one of those who attend St. Ursula, and I would fain wear these ornaments for once, but Muhme likes it not, and I said I would ask if you deemed it well or not.'

'And wherefore likes she it not?'

'She—she says—they should be kept for my marriage day,' said Rosilde, colouring like her own flower.

'Ah, says she so?' said the old man, smiling, and glancing at Ulfric. 'When that day comes we shall

have a fair bride, methinks. How say you, Sir Ulfric?'

Ulfric bent his head, smiling too.

'I shall not wear them then,' said Rosilde, turning a little pale, but speaking resolutely, and as if glad to make her determination known. 'They are only fit for the bride of a noble, and that I shall never be.'

'Wherefore, I pray you, sweet cousin?' asked Ulfric, surprised, but yet more amused than surprised, and esteeming her protest little more serious than if a bird had fluttered and pecked at him.

'Aye, tell us that,' laughed Philip Welser. 'Wherefore should not the Rose of Burgstein mate among her peers?'

He too spoke in the indulgent tone which a man uses to a favourite child.

'I will tell you,' she answered, aware that the decisive moment must come in which she must manifest those thoughts and feelings which had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength ever since one memorable night when all her pity and sympathy had been given once and for ever to the oppressed, and as she stood facing all her hearers they began to perceive that this was no childish freak or sportive matter, and listened gravely. 'I might say that I would not wed a noble because I have cast in my lot with those to whom I owe everything, life itself—who have risked their own lives for my sake, and sheltered and loved me, and nothing shall divide me from them; but that is not all—not nearly all.'

'Sweet kinswoman, none worthy to call you wife would seek to part you in heart from these dear and worthy friends,' said Ulfric. 'Most dear indeed should they ever be; none can ever do for you what they have done.'

'Needs not to tell me that,' said Rosilde, with a touch of impatience so like her ways when first she came, a little imperious child, to the Bannwart's house, that it called a smile to Hildemund's face, though he was listening, like Ulfric, in great anxiety and suspense to what she was saying.

'But there is more. When I learned how it stood between serf and noble, what deeds the lords wrought in the war, yes, and in peace too, and thought no shame, then I wished I were rather the lowliest peasant in Germany than one of a race so hated and so evil. I said then—Hildemund, have you forgotten?—that I would be no more Rosilde von Burgstein, nor have any more name and rank, but give myself as Frau Magdalene does, to help the poor and down-trodden, and so I do, as in me lies, and so I will all my life.'

She spoke with vehemence. Philip Welser lifted up his hands in astonishment.

'Dear maid, that may you well do as a noble lady,' said Ulfric, touched, but unshaken in his purpose, and knowing too little of girl nature to read the secret feeling, which, half unknown to Rosilde herself, underlay and prompted her course of action.

'I think not so,' she answered; 'the peasants hold the nobles in fear and suspicion, but they feel otherwise to the burgher; they will take gift or comfort at his hand without a secret curse. Ah, I would I could go back to Burgstein, and help our people there.'

'Would you rebuild the castle, cousin?' asked Ulfric, smiling, and recollecting his own resolve that if a miracle could be worked in his behalf he would devote his life to the suffering and sorrowing. With this enthusiastic helper it would indeed be a pleasant task.

'No, never. Let the castle crumble and fall; who knows what cruel deeds have been done therein? Bärbele has told me things. . . I scarce understood her then; but I remember them now. No, I would have a dwelling in the valley, and dry up all tears, and make every one forget these last evil years.'

'Alack!' said Philip Welser. 'A child's dream, dear maiden.'

'Then no more should be shed. And Herr Basil. . . . Ah, but he is not there. Yet I would I could go back.

Hildemund had drawn a little apart while she spoke; but Ulfric, lifting his eye to a mirror opposite, caught

the look he was bending upon her, a look so intense and mournful that all his secret was told in it. Ulfric started, but Hildemund, unconscious of being observed, brushed his hand hastily across his brow, and silently left the room. Rosilde did not hear his step on the thick carpet, but as the door closed she glanced round and perceived his departure. Her face clouded with pain and disappointment; she looked as if she would fain have gone too, but a dawning consciousness withheld her.

'No, Herr Basil is not there,' said Ulfric, after a brief pause into which many thoughts were crowded. 'But I have seen him not long since, at Hamburg, whither I went to have one more sight of him. He is serving in a hospital of the Knights of St. Lazarus, whose order tend not the ordinary sick alone, but also lepers—nay, whose Grand Master was long chosen from those unhappy ones.'

He spoke with deep feeling. 'Had I known of this pious order formerly, surely I had sought to enter it when I thought myself one of those outcasts, and so had at least the consolation of aiding others.'

'But—these Knights—how can they tend the lepers, and not themselves fall under the like curse?' asked Rosilde, astonished.

'The Knights do but overlook all that is done; the lepers tend each other, those that are least sick caring for the more grievously afflicted, yet is it none the less a holy and self-devoted life,' said Ulfric; and, in the pause which followed, his resolution on that far-off day returned with new urgency, and seemed to call for a fuller, more earnest accomplishment than heretofore. While he had rejoiced in the full tide of life restored to him and basked in fair hopes it had seemed a bright thing; but life looked less sweet, less sunny since he had surprised that look of Hildemund's.

'And the good father?'

'I saw him but through a grating, for he has given himself up altogether, as though he were one of those he tends, and lives among them, and serves them with his own hands. Wan he was, and pale; but there was a

happier look in his face than ever I remember there of old.'

'But now, Sir Ulfric,' interposed Master Welser, a little impatient of the digression from what he thought far weightier matters, 'were it not well to acquaint our Dornröschen here of certain matters whereof we spoke ere she came in? Hearken, my maid, we learn that Graf Lichtenberg is coming hither, as he avers, on affairs whereof he has to treat with the town, but as we guess, to meet the Duke, for so greatly have Ulrich's fortunes changed, that the Graf trembles for his lands, or rather yours—in Würtemberg.'

'Graf Lichtenberg!' she exclaimed, shrinking to his side.

'Aye, and if he set eyes, as belike he will, on one Röschen Dahn, and know her again, what will come thereof?'

She looked from one to the other like a frightened bird.

'Nay, fear not,' said Ulfric, soothingly, 'it is time that I put forward my right, and give him to know I am a living man; I have but bided my time, and I am nearer of kin to you than he, and if need be, we will appeal to the Rath, as Master Welser counsels, for protection and judgment.'

'But hearken yet, little one,' said Master Welser, in his kind, fatherly way, as he took her hand, 'better yet were it if a husband's shield were over you; then could no Graf in Germany claim you nor threat you with his son; nought else, I think, offers security in these rude times, and glad my niece Magdalene and I am that a brave and honoured knight offers to shelter our rosebud. Nay, this is no time for silly maiden coyness; cling not thus to me, foolish maid, but give this little hand in my presence to Sir Ulfric, your guardian and kinsman, and thank the saints he is not Sir Wolfgang.'

Rosilde stood up at his bidding, but she was very pale, and her face was full of dismay. This was no maiden coyness, as Master Welser had thought; a

woman's feelings, a woman's strong recoil from a man she did not love were written there.

'I cannot!' she said, very low, and was gone before either could speak.

'What ails the silly maid?' exclaimed Master Welser, astonished. 'What would she have? Heed her not, Sir Ulfric; she is a wayward child who knows not what is for her good. Truly, all the problems of the schools, all the crabbed manuscripts that ever were written were easier to deal with than to read a girl's silly heart. But think not of it, think not of it, Sir Ulfric. 'Tis but that she knows not what she would.'

'I fear me it is not so, Master Welser,' said Ulfric, stabbed to the very heart by the expression which he had seen in Rosilde's face. 'I fear she knows all too well for me.'

'Nay, seek my niece Magdalene, and tell her how the matter stands. I pray you believe this is no fault of hers. I know not whence the child has learned these peevish fancies. Never spoke she thus before. Speak with my niece, I pray you, good Sir Ulfric.'

Ulfric made a sign of assent. In deep and troubled self-questioning he ascended the stairs leading from Master Welser's rooms to that part of the house inhabited by Magdalene. He needed no guide, for this way had become perfectly familiar to him during his former visit to Ulm, when he had been a guest in Master Welser's house. In the anteroom of Magdalene's apartments, standing together in the deep embrasure of a window, were Rosilde and Hildemund. Ulfric paused an instant. 'My love and my friend! do I lose both?' he thought, with a sharp pang of suspicion that Hildemund, whom he held so dear and trusted so entirely, had played him false. He heard Rosilde's last words as he approached unnoticed.

'Hildemund! you knew!' she exclaimed, and the words were full of pain, wonder, and incredulity.

'Surely,' Hildemund answered, resolutely steadying his voice. 'Sir Ulfric spoke often thereof to me in these last months since he came to Hohentwiel. And

truly, sweet lady mine, nowhere can more gallant knight nor truer heart be found, and she who has his love owns a crown of honour.'

'Think you so?' said Rosilde, salt tears rushing to her eyes, and she broke away from him as she had done from Philip Welser, and fled into the inner room without seeing Ulfric.

Neither did Hildemund, who turned away and looked out into the street without seeing anything there, while he muttered audibly, 'The saints help me! this is hard;' and then he started and turned as Ulfric laid a hand on his shoulder, looked him kindly and gravely in the eyes, and passed on without a word.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Long ere the hour for High Mass the streets of Ulm were alive with the crowd already gathered to see the procession pass on its way to the Münster, a long and devious way, since it traversed all the principal streets first. The sun had already drunk up the mist which had during the night arisen from the Danube and the Iller, and its beams shone clear and strong, making the red, yellow, and green tiles on the steep roofs to glisten dazzlingly, and playing in the bright waters of the dancing fountains.

Such a crowd as this at a time when every rank and trade had its distinguishing costume could not fail to be a gay and picturesque sight, full of life and colour. In the throng pouring out of every house and street were men and women of every degree. Here a reverend counsellor made his way to the Rathhaus, easily recognised by his black velvet doublet, purple sleeves, and stockings to match, silver grey coat and breeches, and the gold chain on his breast, as well as by a certain dignity and conscious authority. There a burgher in simpler dress of dark brown steered his wife and daughters, arrayed in crimson satin or dark blue,

through the press, shrinking, perhaps, with unconcealed disgust from a Jew, marked out by the red and yellow garment which, by order of the Rath, all of Israelitish race were obliged to wear.

Little groups of laughing, chattering girls clustered at the windows overhead, their long plaits falling over their shoulders, and their curls blown about under their little gold-embroidered caps as they commented on the crowd below and leant out to hang up garlands of yew and pine, or bright flags and shawls, and many-coloured carpets. Masks began to appear and play mad pranks, arousing outcries and laughter, and adding to the gay colouring by their motley dresses, for a carnival was mingled with the solemnities of the day. Workmen were hurriedly putting the last touches to the bowers and arches, decked with blossoms and fluttering ribbons, which were set up wherever two streets crossed, and where an open space offered itself little groups were dancing to the zither of some vagrant minstrel. Peasants came flocking in from all the district round, nobles from distant castles. Such an Ursul-day had not been seen in the memory of man, for in addition to the usual cause of interest there was the great event that on the evening before a piece of St. Ursula's veil had been sent to the clergy at Ulm by the Chapter of Cologne, and all the city were eager to do honour to the precious relic. It was not without reason that the canons of Ulm had counted on the effect of such a priceless gift and grace done to the city; for the moment, the taint of Lutheranism which had crept into it seemed entirely blown away. The most heretical man in Ulm could not refrain from seeking the Münster and triumphing in his heart over the possession of such a relic as neither Augsburg nor Nüremberg themselves could surpass.

The crowd of good-humoured faces grew denser, and the pressure stronger, but all inconvenience was taken with stolid good temper, and the hum of voices became one great roar of sound, though no one seemed to know he was speaking louder than usual. Many

times a great laugh had followed the invariable success of some rogues shouting out, 'They come! they come!' and causing all heads to turn, all necks to be outstretched, long before the blare of trumpets and the triple boom of a cannon from the citadel, followed by the clang and clash of all the bells in the town, gave notice that the procession was really beginning to move forward. A way was cleared with difficulty by the halberds of the town guard, and slowly through the long square before the Rathhaus moved the great banner of the city, preceding all the guilds in due rank and order; weavers and bakers, tanners, butchers, redsmiths, and artists, and all the other corporations of Ulm, armed, and bearing the symbols of their several occupations, a goodly show, watched with great interest, especially by those who had relations or friends among them, and awakening a running fire of jest and comment among the spectators. Behind the guilds came a train yet more popular, of youths and maidens representing prophets and saints; David bearing a harp, the Magi in Eastern costume, carrying their gifts; St. Katharine with her wheel, and Barbara with her tower, and chief of all, St. Ursula, followed by her long line of attendant maidens, with the last lingering white roses of autumn in their hair, and crosses on their breasts, all the flower of Ulmer maidens moving by with downcast eyes and folded hands, demurely ignoring the troop of knights and men-at-arms who followed St. Ursula's handsome bridegroom as he walked beside his saintly bride, and the crowd pressed forward in spite of the halberdiers, and loudly recognised now one, now another, and laughed and rejoiced and closed in again as the procession passed on, and followed in the rear and on either side, a dense mass of good-humoured, delighted human beings, prepared to enjoy themselves from morning to night.

As the procession slowly swept past the mouth of the great Herdbrückgasse, a party of knights who had ridden in through the Donauthor, and had drawn rein to await its approach, lifted their hats, and prepared to

follow in the rear when it should have gone by. The spectators had neither time nor thought to waste on them, nor indeed was it generally known in the city that Duke Ulrich would be present on this day. He had desired that his coming should attract as little attention as possible; his little troop had come quietly and unobserved into the town, and he sat now on the fine black charger to whose strength and speed he had at least once owed his life, with Graf Eberstein by his side, looking on and exchanging remarks with the nobles around him.

'A goodly sight!' he laughed, as the festal car of the Innkeepers passed by, with a jovial company seated under the leafy bower erected upon it, amid whose boughs hung garlands of feathered and four-footed game, while a boar's head, mighty pasties, and tall flagons loaded the table in front of them. 'The horses are as sleek and well-fed as the hosts themselves. I know not how Christopher is faring among his uncles of Bavaria, but truly we have seldom seen such goodly and plentiful victuals on our table at Hohentwiel.'

'Well, my lord,' answered Eberstein, 'perchance we shall fare better at Stuttgardt.'

'Aye!' said Ulrich, his face brightening, 'and that ere long, methinks. Said I not truly when the monk came to us that the tide had turned? Stuttgardt will not be slow to open her gates if all goes well between us and the Rath here. Peace! here comes St. Ursula herself and her bridegroom. Methinks that had Etherius wedded yon stately damsel he had found himself speedily under her slipper! Truly Ulm can boast of her pretty maidens. What say you, von Lagerström?'

The other knights smiled at the appeal to one who was known to be always a prey to a fair face, and the young noble answered eagerly, 'Most true, my lord; one passes but now with a flying angel clasping her mantle, and pearls in her hair—St. Willibald! What hair!—thick as a cloak and down well-nigh to her knees! —to my thinking she is the fairest we have yet beheld.'

'Nay!' said Ulrich, following her with his eyes.

'Many a more beautiful piece of flesh and blood has gone past, yet she has somewhat of air and mien that others lack. Hildemund, say, who plays the part of St. Ursula, and who that damsel even now passing may be?'

Hildemund had joined the Duke when he entered the city. He had not raised his eyes when von Lagerström spoke, but it seemed to him as if he knew beforehand who was near, and what would be said. Ulfric, on the other hand, followed her with a long gaze, which was like a sad farewell. No word had passed between them of any private nature since the evening before, and Hildemund did not know how much Ulfric had discovered or how little; but strong in the consciousness of having acted honourably and loyally, he waited to learn what that earnest, silent look should mean which Ulfric had cast on him.

'My lord,' he answered, 'she who represents the chief part is Margarethe Burckhardt, daughter of the Schultheiss, and the other maiden——' he stopped and looked at Ulfric, as if it were rather his right to complete the explanation. Ulfric was silent, but the Duke understood without further words.

'So!' he said, with a smile. 'Come beside me, Sir Ulfric, I would speak with you.'

Hildemund thought he could guess what was passing between them in the low toned conversation which followed, but he was perplexed by the surprise and regret which presently appeared on the Duke's countenance; he could have thought that Ulfric had announced some purpose from which the Duke was trying to dissuade him.

He felt as if he must not look or listen, and turned away to Graf Eberstein, who was saying with a laugh, 'Until now I have ever held that the heathens of Cologne could scarce do otherwise than they did when eleven thousand virgins appeared on their shores, but if they were as fair as these, I hold now that even so many were not over-numerous.'

All laughed, and the Duke, breaking off his conversation with Ulfric, still with that look of surprise and

displeased perplexity on his face, gave a sign to ride onward, and they gradually moved into the main stream of spectators, flowing towards the Münster. The Duke started slightly, and pointed to a couple of knights riding in front of them, with several retainers, saying to Ulfric, 'See you the colours of your house? Were yonder noble to look round, he might see more than he counted for. Mark you how the temper of father and son shows itself! The Junker would ride down all who come in his way—see, he can scarce refrain from drawing sword on yonder halberdier, who bars his way as though Sir Wolfgang of Lichtenberg were but a craftsman, until the crowd can give back. The father speaks all smooth, and wins a passage by fair words and jests. Yet rather would I have to deal with that broad-shouldered churl than with the courteous hypocrite his sire.'

'Aye, my lord,' said Graf Eberstein, who heard what was said, 'Cruel and violent the youth is, but base, never. Did he but know how his father has crept and crouched to high place, methinks he would disown his name.'

They made their way slowly through the surging crowd, now moving at a foot's pace, now having to wait many minutes at a time, but accepting delay and inconvenience with the same good-humoured tolerance as everyone else around them, and amusing themselves with the humours of the crowd. Graf Lichtenberg, looking back, presently became aware who the troop behind him were, but the throng between kept them at a considerable distance, and he could not recognise any faces but those of the Duke and Eberstein, who rode first, nor was it any part of his purpose publicly to accost Ulrich. If, however, he did not see all which he might have seen, on the other hand he had already beheld something which very fully occupied his thoughts. He too had marked the slender figure which had attracted young von Lagerström's attention, and though, seeing her unexpectedly after all these years whom he had begun to believe must be dead, he

might not have recognised Rosilde, he knew at once the jewelled necklet which she wore, the roses of Burgstein, long an heirloom in his family, and his heart gave a great leap in his breast. 'Found!' he said to himself, and all the time that he was answering Wolfgang, and apparently marking all that went on around them, his busy brain was spinning the net in which his fugitive ward should be securely captured.

Bending down from his saddle as there came one of the frequent stoppages which delayed all for a time, he said courteously to a craftsman standing close by, 'Good friend, this is a fair sight, such as few German cities can show. Prithee how are the ladies and the knights who take part in the procession chosen? By their fair faces or their degree?'

'Both, noble sir, so they be of honourable birth,' answered the man addressed.

'The two close behind St. Ursul should surely have both claims. Marked you them?'

'Surely,' said the man, well pleased, 'and so they have. The one on the right was Elizabeth Schöngauer, whose father is head of the cloth-weavers' guild, and she who walked beside her, with the long hair flowing loose, is akin to Mistress Dahn, cousin of my master, worthy Hans Paumgärtner. Many a time when she was a child have I seen her in our counting-house.'

'A Paumgärtner, say you?'

'Nay, a Dahn—Röschen Dahn.'

A sudden movement in the crowd swept them apart, but the Graf had learned enough. Further inquiries could wait. During mass he would have ample time to consider what steps to take, and he was well pleased that Wolfgang had gathered nothing of what was passing, even while impatient of the dulness which never comprehended anything which was not put into plain words. This matter craved wary walking, such as Wolfgang was quite incapable of, especially just when he was so angered and chafed at having to move at the pleasure of craftsmen and townsfolk, that it would be well if he were got within the Münster before

he had harmed anyone. The Graf, anxious to avoid scandal, and to have time for reflection, rejoiced when at length the stately building came in sight, with the throng forced back on either side of its noble doorways, to let the guilds enter and take their places in their respective chapels, while St. Ursula and her attendants were conducted to the special place allotted to them, and the clergy advanced in gorgeous vestments and long array to receive them with even more solemnity and splendour than usual.

The wide space within the cathedral was soon filled from end to end, while the sunlight from without streamed in through the wide portals, open to their full extent for this great occasion, contrasting with the rich and varied hues of the rays which fell from the deeply coloured panes in the tall windows. The large number of townsfolk who could not find standing room within the Münster stood on the steps and overflowed into the square in a dense mass, round the guild cars, and a priest came out and addressed them on the story of Ursula, and the precious gift sent to Ulm from Cologne. It was a striking sight, and the intense stillness of the whole crowd while the priest spoke was not the least striking part, but there were not wanting hearts full of trouble in the throng, nor busy brains plotting mischief, both within and without the Münster, even while all knelt and prayed with seeming reverence. For the Duke's party a way had been made, but the multitude closed in again like a flood temporarily divided, and Graf Lichtenberg found himself on the edge of so compact a mass of people, that even had he wished it much more than he did, it would have been impossible to penetrate further. With a sign to his little troop he turned bridle, and made his way back to his hostelry, the 'Three Kings,' where Magdalene had alighted when she returned to Ulm. Thence he saw Philip Welser when he came home from mass, with his family, except Hildemund, who used the pretext of being in attendance on the Duke to avoid meeting Rosilde. From the window of his chamber the Graf watched her cross the square be-

side Magdalene. She looked pale and weary, as she well might, after such an exhausting ceremony, but if her heart had been lighter perhaps she would not have moved with so spiritless a step. She was young enough too to resent that the great day should have brought her only disappointment. Ulfric was not to be seen any more than Hildemund, as Magdalene noted with uneasiness. What Master Welser had reported, and the little which she had gleaned from Rosilde was food for anxious foreboding, and then she felt sure that Graf Lichtenberg's coming must lead to ill. She felt strangely out of tune with the general festivity, the more that her habitual tone of mind led her to be somewhat indifferent to that gift—a bit of St. Ursula's veil—in which the city was exulting.

A great banquet in the Rathhaus followed the ceremonies of the morning, imitated as far as possible in every house in the city, the richer inhabitants supplying means to the poorer to entertain themselves and their friends, and this year the feasting in the Rathhaus was more profuse and magnificent than usual, because of the greatness of the occasion, and because Duke Ulrich was to take part in it. No business could be transacted, even had time allowed, where wine flowed so freely that not a few even of the council were scarcely able to appear at the stately dance which concluded the day. It was held in the great council chamber, where the torchlight flickered brightly on the low ceiling and the dark wainscoting, and the long row of grave portraits facing the windows, where the arms of all the chief families of Ulm might be seen in the painted glass, portraits of many generations of burgomasters, with one hand on their hips and the other on a table. The unchanging faces looked gravely down on the brilliant crowd below and the movements of the dancers in the middle of the hall, almost with a rebuke in their eyes which seemed to follow one and another; but they belonged to the past, and those on whom they looked to the present, and no one bestowed a thought or a glance on them.

Graf Lichtenberg was not one of those assembled in the Rathhaus. He kept in the background until the morrow, when he purposed to strike a decisive blow, and he feared too how Wolfgang might conduct himself among those whom he regarded as 'a burgher pack.' Could he have been at ease to leave him elsewhere he had not brought him to Ulm, but he felt the need of keeping him under his own eye, since his rash strictures on his return to Vienna upon the conduct of Graf Redwitz at Grünau had aroused the enmity of the powerful noble, an enmity the more intense from the semi-disgrace in which he found himself. Wolfgang had proved himself so little fitted for court life that his father found it needful to withdraw him from Vienna. It was evident that some other career than that of a courtier must be found for him, and the Graf was anxiously seeking other means of advancing his fortunes. A project of a wealthy alliance had been ruined by his drawing on himself the hostility of the Redwitz family, and nothing could have been more opportune than the discovery of Rosilde. Graf Lichtenberg had never felt secure in possession of her lands. He had always had a lurking fear that one day she would reappear and demand her heritage. It must now be his part to forestall such a demand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

If all Ulm had with one accord given itself up on the Ursul-tag to holiday making, by early morning on the next day the city had resumed its usual aspect, and seemed making up by added diligence for the pause in its usual busy life. Again the shops and counting-houses were open, and heavy waggons rolled slowly through the narrow streets, and paused to be laden or unladen before the warehouses, and only a forgotten and half-faded wreath here and there remained to testify to the preceding day. The space before the Münster, but a few hours before so densely peopled,

was empty, except for a small country cart drawn by oxen, which now and then crossed it, or an occasional worshipper going into the cathedral, where the sacristans, with a little troop of underlings, were removing the hangings and sweeping the floor, while mass went on in one of the chapels; or a stray customer sought the little shops built against the Münster, and looking like toy buildings at the foot of the great red tower. The workshops of the freemasons who had been engaged on it at the end of the previous century still stood in its mighty shadow, but no sound came from them; for some years the progress of the building had been arrested, and no stone was yet laid of the noble spire which was planned to crown the edifice. The city was always talking of continuing the work, but one cause and another hindered it, and it was not resumed, then nor later.

The Rath were as fully occupied as the rest of the townsfolk, for every member had been summoned to take his place to discuss the proposals made to and by the Duke of Würtemberg, and Ulm had been too long 'gut bündisch' for unanimity to reign in their counsels when aid to Ulrich was under consideration. It was not on such an occasion as this that the merchant city showed to the best advantage. The burghers were apt to drive hard bargains with those who needed their aid, and gain all the advantage they could, taking much more than they were willing to give. Of generosity or public spirit, beyond their own walls, they knew absolutely nothing; patriotism for them meant the advantage of Ulm, and theirs was essentially that charity which ends as well as begins at home. All the self-control which Ulrich had so hardly learned in exile and misfortune was sorely tried, and those of his nobles who accompanied him to the Rathhaus marvelled to see the strong resolution with which he governed himself, and now yielded, now stood firm, but was ever the Duke of Würtemberg, a prince conscious of his station and dignity, neither to be cajoled nor threatened, and showing no sign of the stormy temper which once was aroused by the slightest opposition. While the

debate was going on, one of the officials had entered and spoken apart with the Burgomaster, who made a brief and hasty answer, as to something which could not be allowed to interfere with weightier matters, but when at length the treaty with Ulrich was concluded, to the general satisfaction of all concerned, he rose in his place, and glancing round for a moment to secure attention, said: 'Since now we have but to commit to writing, and to sign the conditions agreed on between this our city and the noble Duke of Würtemberg, we have leisure to listen unto another matter which is brought before us. Graf von Lichtenberg claims to be heard touching his ward and kinswoman, who, as he avers, is sheltered and hidden from him under the roof of worthy Master Philip Welser, our honoured brother counsellor and fellow-townsman. Does it please you, worshipful sirs, that this lord appear to plead his cause?' All eyes turned in surprised inquiry on Philip Welser, who rose and answered: 'She of whom he speaks is indeed under my roof, and by my mouth denies his claim, and appeals to the protection and judgment of this council.'

'It were well then that both parties be summoned,' said the Burgomaster, and there was a murmur of assent.

'An it please you I will send for not only the damsel, but my niece, since she brought her hither, and can if need be tell your worship wherefore the maid was—I deny it not—stolen away and hidden here,' said Master Welser, and there was again a general assent, while Ulrich said, 'Since this runaway can scarce be any other than Rosilde of Burgstein, long reputed dead, whose lands lie chiefly in Würtemberg, I would fain, with your permission, my worthy masters, remain to hear the cause.'

'We are honoured by your presence, my lord,' said the Burgomaster, and as he spoke von Lichtenberg and his son entered, the Graf bowing with studied courtesy first to the Rathsherren and then to Ulrich, while Wolfgang looked round with a fierce and haughty

stare, chafing visibly at thus submitting his cause to a burgher tribunal.

'Worthy sirs,' the Graf said, 'I thank you that you thus readily lend us your ear. I might indeed in all right and justice claim and bear hence my ward, contracted in childhood to this my son, and therefore doubly under my authority, but far be it from me to show even seeming slight or discourtesy to your city or yourselves. Rather do I thank good Master Welser, that he has thus cherished and sheltered her whom I had believed to have perished in the sack of Schloss Burgstein, and make known my gratitude to his honoured niece, Frau Magdalene Dahn, who saved and guarded her in those wild and evil times, scarce yet gone by, which came with the peasant war. Methinks there is no more to say on the matter.'

The temperate and courteous tone of this address made a strong and favourable impression on the Rath.

'We have neither the desire nor the right to withhold your ward, my lord,' said the Burgomaster, glancing round to claim assent, 'but it would seem that she denies your claim.'

'I am her nearest of kin,' answered von Lichtenberg.

'She was promised me to wife by her father,' broke in Wolfgang; 'mine she is, and mine she shall be, whether any here will or no—'tis all one to me.'

'Young sir, that shall yet be seen,' said the Burgomaster displeased. 'Law, not the strong hand, rules here. Master Welser, comes the maiden?'

'Aye, she is here,' said Philip Welser, as the doors were thrown open, and Magdalene entered, leading Rosilde, who had Hildemund on her other side, clasping fast the fingers which were very cold and trembling, though she seemed outwardly calm and fearless. She made a grave reverence to the council, where she knew almost every face well, from the venerable countenance of Philip Welser to that of the young under-secretary, too constant a visitor at the Welser house for his own peace. There was a mingled sweetness and resolution

in her expression which made her very attractive even in the grave eyes of the Rath, and Ulrich regarded her with great interest.

'Welcome at length, fair ward and cousin,' said von Lichtenberg, with a faint, mocking smile, as she took her place, and Wolfgang surveyed her much as a hawk might have stared at a dove on which he was preparing to pounce. 'I know not by what mischance I have been long led to believe you dead, but right glad am I that the truth is at length made clear.'

'My lord, I have been among faithful friends, else indeed it may be I had died as you deemed,' answered Rosilde's clear, silvery voice, 'but ward of yours I am not, nor know I of any claim you have over me, since a nearer kinsman lives than you.'

'You have no nearer kinsman than myself, fair cousin.'

'Therein you err,' said Ulfric, stepping out of the group of knights standing behind the Duke, and confronting the man who had so deeply injured him with a stern and fixed gaze. 'I, Ulfric of Lichtenberg, son of your elder brother, heir of his lands and head of our house, stand nearer akin to Rosilde of Burgstein than any man alive.'

'Thou! Here!' exclaimed Graf Lichtenberg, livid with dismay. 'Thou! wouldst force me to proclaim our shame? Worthy Rath, this shameless man, my nephew indeed, but long dead to us all—must I unveil the truth and speak our disgrace? I know not how he comes here in the company of men like yourselves, and among knights and nobles and this high prince, he who however fair his face and dauntless his air, has the taint of leprosy on him!'

There was a hasty shuddering movement throughout the hall, and looks of horror and aversion were cast on Ulfric.

''Tis lightly said,' he answered in a deep, calm voice, still with his eyes fixed on the baleful and ashy face of the Graf; 'men are ever willing to believe what they desire, and truly I think that may explain how you,

fair uncle, whom few have deceived, lent so ready an ear to the leech Thomas Knades, when, for reasons which perchance you would not have me lay before this honourable Rath, he bid you count me a leper. But leper I never was, and if you doubt thereof, it needs but to summon him from Regensburg, where he dwells as Father Arnolph, and he will bear all needful testimony. Would you have me say more?'

The eyes which had rested on Ulfric now turned to Graf Lichtenberg with an unmistakable expression. For the first time in his life he stood confounded, striving in vain for words. Almost more bitter than the consequences which this resurrection entailed was the discovery that he had been gulled and tricked by his tool. Wolfgang looked first at him, then at Ulfric, amazed, bewildered, dimly understanding that much was implied which for the honour of his family Ulfric would not speak more plainly.

'It needs not, as I deem, to speak further on this cause,' said the Burgomaster, breaking the short significant pause; 'if the noble Sir Ulfric be the guardian of the maiden, it is for him to dispose of her as he thinks well.'

'Nay,' said von Lichtenberg, struggling to recover himself and grasp something in the wreck, 'were she ten times his ward she is none the less contracted to my son.'

'Is this so, Fräulein?' asked Philip Welser.

'Never! worthy sir,' answered Rosilde.

'How!' broke in Wolfgang, hardly restrained by the stern exclamation of the Graf, 'Peace, boy. And you, fair cousin, would you forswear yourself by denying that from infancy you were held the bride of my son, by your father's full consent and desire? And though in an angry moment he would fain, I deny it not, have recalled his word, yet well he knew that a solemn troth-plight and contract could not be broken or set aside, entered into by the parents of both parties. Is it not so, worshipful sirs?'

He turned to the Rath as he spoke.

'Surely,' all answered, for such a compact was held little less binding than marriage itself, and the calm and scornful certainty with which he had spoken made a great impression. Rosilde herself was not now sure whether what he asserted was not the truth, and she looked now at Hildemund and now at Ulfric with an appealing terror which went against her cause.

'If this be so, the Graf has the stronger claim,' said the Burgomaster, slowly. Von Lichtenberg bowed low in answer.

'Sure I am that I may count on justice from the worthy burghers of Ulm,' he said, 'and if need be, Brother Lucas, who was present when the contract was made, will testify to the matter, but methinks my word should be enough.'

'If the maiden were too young to recollect the thing, surely the Junker should have some memory of it?' said Philip Welser.

'Nay, a boy, a child, would better remember hawk or hound than a troth plight,' said the Graf, smiling.

'She was ever deemed mine, that I know,' said Wolfgang, sullenly. 'I recollect nought beyond, but it shall be ill for him who withholds her from me, whether knight or churl.'

There was a pause; the members of the Rath leaned forward and spoke low together; Magdalene pressed the ice-cold hand which lay in hers; Philip Welser's face grew very anxious, and Ulfric opened his lips to speak, but refrained. He could not resolve, even in this strait, to accuse his kinsman of the foul deed which lay between him and Rosilde. Hildemund stepped forward.

'Honoured sirs,' he said, and at the sound of his voice Wolfgang recognised him, and glared furiously upon him, hardly restrained by his father's strong and silent grasp, 'ere you judge this cause, please you hear what I have to tell of a deed done on the day which made this Edelfräulein an orphan.'

Then Graf Lichtenberg knew who had told Walther the seneschal, and in spite of himself he made a move-

ment as if to interrupt, but quickly recollecting that Walther was dead, and that for the honour of his name Ulfric, whatever he had learned, would be silent, he changed his mind, and listened with unmoved and lofty scorn while Hildemund related the quarrel of the kinsmen at Schloss Burgstein, and the events which followed. To Rosilde it was all new; pale, with parted lips and hands pressed hard together, she heard the tale, while the deepening attention of the counsellors, and an occasional murmur or interchange of looks, showed how strongly it affected them. The Duke sat by, watching all keenly, but studiously observing the part of a spectator, present only through the courtesy of the tribunal on whom judgment depended.

'Prithee, young sir, since you saw not the Freiherr's death how know you how he came by it?' said von Lichtenberg, as Hildemund, much moved, paused an instant.

'I saw it not indeed, but I can call one who did,' answered Hildemund, with a glance at Ulfric, which the Graf surprised, and showed that he had surprised by a momentary look of malignant hatred.

'Whither tends all you have said, young sir?' asked the Burgomaster.'

'To this,' Hildemund answered, 'that Rosilde of Burgstein cannot wed the son of him who planned her father's murder, and that he did so I aver, and will prove it on his body.' He flung his glove before the feet of the Graf as he spoke.

Von Lichtenberg answered only by a slight gesture of disdain, but with a shout of inarticulate fury Wolfgang sprang forward.

'Thou—thou churl!' he stammered, his voice thick with rage; 'dost thou accuse my father of this treachery? Dost think any ear will heed the slanders of a base-born varlet—any noble meet a new-baked knight like thee in honourable combat? Thou art scarce worthy to be scourged by my grooms!'

'Hold!' exclaimed the Duke, in a voice of command which controlled even Wolfgang in the height of his

fury. 'Stand back, Sir Hildemund. I will not have this quarrel taken up. He who insults you insults also the prince at whose sword you received knighthood. Peace, mad boy, and brawl not in this presence.'

'Pardon him, my lord; were he as old as I, he would heed little for an idle accusation such as none here credit,' said the Graf, looking calmly from face to face along the council board.

'It were well that this Kunz were summoned if he be in the city,' said Philip Welser. 'That were but just to all.'

'Aye, aye, have him hither; let this slanderer be confronted by his equals,' burst in Wolfgang. 'The man is at the "Three Crowns."'

He stopped as if he had been struck, so dark and menacing was the glance which his father gave him, and so much did it convey, although the Graf said indifferently, 'So be it, though I know not how the tale, if it turn out true, can either touch me—I deign not to justify myself from so wild a charge—or bear on the matter of a solemn contract between my son and the Edelfräulein of Burgstein.'

No one answered, and the deep pause and hush while Kunz was summoned seemed to strangely affect Wolfgang. He turned from dark-red to pale, and his eyes roved wildly and full of increasing trouble over the faces of the council and those of his father and Ulfric, who stood with a sad and downcast look, as if deeply humiliated by what was passing, yet finding no word of protest or defence. The Graf alone preserved his usual calm, weary, indifferent air, making no sign when Kunz appeared, astonished and perplexed by the summons, and evidently asking himself the cause of it. He looked round inquiringly on the counsellors, seated in their places, the group of knights around Ulrich's chair of state, Magdalene and Rosilde, and his own master, whose face told him nothing. Nor did the sight of Rosilde, whom he did not recognise, though she shrank with irrepressible horror at the sight of him, even while gazing with a sort of fascination at her father's murderer.

Graf Lichtenberg made a sign to the Burgomaster to ask what he would, and Wolfgang came a step nearer, with an eager hope in his eyes, dashed by growing fear. The Secretary of the Rath put the usual questions to one under accusation, as to name and residence, and then looked to the Burgomaster for further questions, uncertain how to proceed in so unusual a case.

'Hark you, sirrah,' said the Burgomaster, 'we know too much for it to serve your turn to lie. Why slew you the Freiherr von Burgstein in the Eschthal? Answer fully, or the question awaits you.'

Kunz did not need to be told that 'the question' meant rack and cord, but he held his peace.

'My lord of Lichtenberg, if you bid him reply, mayhap he were less dumb,' said one of the Rath.

'Give answer, fellow,' said the Graf.

'I knew he would do my lord an ill turn if he lived,' said Kunz, readily enough.

'So! And at whose bidding did you thus?'

'No man's.'

'How! no man's?'

'No man's,' he repeated doggedly.

'Would you have me believe that no man knew of your intent, nor egged you on?'

'No one,' he answered again, without looking up.

All remained convinced that the old follower of the Graf was lying at the cost of his life for his master. The keen eyes of the Duke saw a gleam of relief flit over the Graf's countenance.

'You hear, worthy sirs,' he said; 'I will not suppose that you needed to examine this man to remove suspicion of myself, but for your further satisfaction I will ask him more. Speak, man, knew I ought of your purpose?'

'Nought, my lord,' answered Kunz, in the same dull, unchanging tone.

'Have him to prison,' said the Burgomaster, and Kunz was led out, turning for a moment a look of pitiful appeal on his lord; then, as he met no response from

those calm and cold eyes, he muttered, 'I knew St. Eustace bore me malice,' and followed the officials who led him away.

'A right faithful follower,' murmured the Duke, audibly, expressing the thoughts of all there, while the Graf, glancing at the baffled countenances around him, said with half-veiled triumph, 'And now, worshipful sirs, please you end this matter which has kept us too long; methinks, despite the claims of my fair nephew, I have by law and usage the keeping of my son's betrothed, her parents being dead, until the marriage, which shall speedily take place.'

'True it is that you have law on your side, Sir Graf,' answered the Burgomaster, reluctantly, while more than one of the Rath muttered something about giving the lamb to the wolf, 'and we are the last to deny a claim so founded.' He paused, and Ulfric made a step forward, but before he could speak, Rosilde rose up, and her movement checked Wolfgang, who had also stepped forward, about to speak, and it was amid a general silence of expectation that she said, 'Good sirs, and my Lord Duke, please you hear me. Since I have heard these things that until now a kind pity has kept from me, I am steadfastly purposed to marry none, least of all Sir Wolfgang, but to retire into a cloister. I pray you thwart me not; my lands I humbly resign into my sovereign's hands, praying him to protect me, and do with them as he will.'

'And you do well! Aye, get you to a cloister; I am no mate for you. Let us go hence; I would we had never come!' exclaimed Wolfgang, overcome by the passion of shame and despair which he had vainly tried to master; and he suddenly broke from the hall, leaving everyone taken by surprise, and touched with unexpected pity, excepting only his father, whose face was as dark as night.

'Headstrong fool!' he muttered, 'all is over now.' But true to the part he had played all along, he bowed to the Rath and the Duke, and saying to Rosilde, 'The bride of heaven, so be it, but of none else. Farewell,

sweet cousin; my benison on your vocation, which seemeth something sudden,' he followed his son, with a tumult of wrath, apprehension, and foreboding in his heart.

'Tis pity!' said Philip Welser, with deep regret, as he left his place, and came up to Rosilde, who had sunk on her chair, pale and trembling, while she looked at Hildemund, who met her eyes now with all his heart in his own. 'The Rose of Burgstein to wither in a cloister!'

'Nay, such a contract, so doubtful, for who can trust either this Graf or his witness—and one so against nature—can scarce hold,' said the Burgomaster. 'The matter, laid before our Holy Father, and well supported, will sure be given in your favour.'

'And thus laid it shall be, on my word as a prince,' said the Duke, emphatically, 'were it but to baffle and chastise yon crafty sinner who goes out with so proud a crest. His Junker is worth ten of him.'

Rosilde drooped her head as she sat, the centre of a little group which had gathered round her, hardly conscious of anything but the barrier she had raised between herself and Hildemund. 'Let us go home,' she was whispering, as Magdalene bent anxiously over her, when a sudden outcry, a running together, a tumult in the square, startled all, and filled the windows with spectators. The Burgomaster hurried out on the balcony, and bent forward over the crowd. 'Hold! hold!' those within heard him call loudly, as he vainly tried to attract attention. 'Know you not our laws? Hold, if you would not lose right hand or life itself by the doomster's axe. They heed not. Master Glockengiesser, call the guard;' and while the Secretary hurried out, Philip Welser exclaimed, 'Tis that young hot-head Sir Wolfgang has fallen out with a young knight, sure one of your train, my Lord Duke. Madmen! they fight as though the streets of Ulm were a meadow by the Blau or the Iller! The Graf seeks to stay them. Will no one part them? 'Tis deadly earnest.'

'One of my train?' said Ulrich, much displeased,

and at such a time! Go, Eberstein, and see who has thus forgotten himself within the walls of this fair town.'

'He is down! Sir Wolfgang is down! Sanctuary! sanctuary! See, the crowd makes way! By St. Sebald here is the guard!' shouted the knights at the windows. ''Tis von Lagerström, my lord.'

'Von Lagerström,' exclaimed Ulrich, greatly annoyed that anything should endanger the good understanding between him and the city; 'he shall dearly abye this.' Almost as he spoke Graf Eberstein returned. 'A bad day's work, my lord, but young von Lagerström is scarce to blame. It would seem that as this unlucky Junker rushed home, all dazed with wrath and shame, he stumbled over von Lagerström, lost in gazing at a comely wench drawing water at the fountain, and when to a rough deed Sir Wolfgang added rougher words, belike our young spark answered not too softly, and then the mad Junker drew upon him and well-nigh ran him through unawares. He could but defend himself, and I trust the noble Rath will deal mercifully with him. Many can testify how it was.'

'Aye,' said the Secretary, who had returned, 'all say never was so mad an assault. They declare one would have thought the Junker of Lichtenberg sought his own death rather than that of his foe.'

'Belike he did!' muttered Ulfric. 'Poor lad!'

'Is he then dead?' asked the Duke.

'As St. Ursula and all her virgins, my lord. He ran on the point of von Lagerström's sword, and fell a dead man before his father's eyes.'

'So the Graf finds himself landless and childless in one day. I could find in my heart to pity him,' said the Duke.

'Good my lord, waste not pity on such a master of renardie. He will yet prosper and do many another ill deed,' said Eberstein. 'It were well for the Fräulein here had the father fallen rather than the son.'

'Aye,' said the Duke, forgetting Wolfgang in this

suggestion. 'Sir Ulfric, this ward of yours may cause yet much ado. Best give her and her rights unto me as her suzerain.'

'I do so, gladly, my lord,' answered Ulfric; and so entirely were girls, especially heiresses, held as the property of their families, that no one was surprised at this summary disposal of Rosilde, without allowing her a voice in the matter. She looked up with fresh fear and anxiety as Ulfric spoke, waiting to hear what should follow, and the counsellors, preparing to escort the Duke with due ceremony from the hall, sat down again to learn what should be the fate of her whom they had seen grow up as Röschen Dahn, and had hardly yet realised as Rosilde von Burgstein. Hildemund gathered himself together, and avoided the loving look which Magdalene gave him. He could not bear it then.

'Fräulein,' said the Duke, after a moment's smiling pause, 'this little hand which holds so many broad lands should of right belong to your kinsman, Sir Ulfric, and surely no fairer lot could be found for any maid. So would I have it, for in Sir Ulfric I count one more of those faithful friends who joined me in misfortune, and forced me to believe in truth and loyal love, when else I had held such things but a dream. But even princes, as none know better than I, cannot do as they would, no, not even to reward a trusty friend, and Sir Ulfric seeks a nobler end than sweet love and pleasant days, as I learn his mind is set to become a Knight of St. Lazarus.'

Hildemund started, and made a movement which Ulfric checked with a kind, authoritative word and sign. Rosilde lifted anxious eyes to him and Hildemund.

'But,' the Duke continued, 'I thank Heaven's good bounty, I have others yet whom it is my duty and my joy to reward, and on one of them I will bestow this hand, unless indeed, gentle Fräulein, your mind be irrevocably set on the cloister and a religious life?'

'It is, my lord,' said Rosilde, imploringly; 'I pray you believe me.'

'I must, and sin it would be to cross so true a vocation, though grieved for your sake I am, Sir Hildemund; for fain would I have given the maiden whom you have so loyally guarded to him who saved my life and delivered my son from captivity. But you hear her resolve.'

'My lord, I knew not that you meant Hildemund,' faltered Rosilde, with naïveté which called a smile on all the grave listening faces around the council board, and made the Duke laugh outright.

'There, take your bride, Sir Hildemund,' he said; 'it would seem we shall hear no more of the cloister. Truly I think that face will better befit the matron's coif than the nun's veil.'

Hildemund advanced, glowing with rapture and surprise, yet with a generous pang for Ulfric.

'My noble master,' he said, 'most thankfully do I acknowledge your goodness, and truly will I seek to merit it, though such a guerdon is beyond the merit of any man. But I think I speak the desire of the Edelfräulein as well as my own when I pray you to give me but her hand, and to bestow her domains on the noble friends of whom you truly say you have no lack. I am not of birth which fits me to take my place among them as landed lord.'

'The maiden and not the lands!' answered Ulrich, in surprise, but far from ill pleased. 'Nay, Burgstein at least should be hers, but that domain lies in Thuringia; it is not mine to keep or withhold; it is a free fief.'

'The Fräulein has but to retain it; none can claim it at her hand; it is her Stammschloss,' said the Burgomaster; 'surely that she will not let go.'

'No,' said Rosilde, lifting her shy and smiling glance to Hildemund, and each thought of what she had said of Burgstein to Philip Welser. For a moment as their eyes met they forgot all but each other, while Ulfric, as he stood apart and looked at them, thought that not even as the leper of the Eschthal had he fully learned

what the loneliness of life could be, yet drank of the bitter cup of self-sacrifice which he had set to his lips without faltering, and set his face steadfastly to mount a loftier, if a less flowery path than that of happier men.

THE END.

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